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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Abolish the Senate

Scott Hennig,
President, Canadian Taxpayers Federation

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Printed in Canada.

WINTER 2025-26

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT
NO. 40063310

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You know when you're in a bad relationship, but you keep telling yourself it can be fixed? You've read the books. Tried counselling. Promised things will get better. And yet, nothing changes.

That's Canada's relationship with the Senate.

For more than 40 years, reformers have tried to fix it. The venerable Ted Byfield popularized the idea of a "Triple-E Senate" in the 1980s – elected, equal and effective. The idea was simple: if we're going to have a second chamber, it should be chosen by voters, represent provinces equally and have real authority.

The Americans built their Senate that way from the beginning, but Canada went another direction. At Confederation, we opted for hand-picked, wealthy landowners to oversee the elected House of Commons.

Since then, we've tried to repair the thing.

The Meech Lake Accord proposed giving provinces more say in appointments. It failed. The Charlottetown Accord came closer to Triple-E reform, with equal provincial representation and elections. It failed, too.

Alberta started holding Senate nominee elections in 1989. Former prime minister Stephen Harper appointed several of these nominees while encouraging other provinces to elect their own. Yet, the Supreme Court ruled official provincial elections would require a constitutional amendment. Harper dropped it.

So, here we are.

Today, prime ministers still appoint senators. The only difference is that instead of party bagmen quietly collecting a paycheque and staying out of sight, we now have "independent" appointees who are told they were selected on merit and are expected to "improve" legislation. Different process. Same charade.

But here's the problem: they were not elected by taxpayers. And yet they can amend, delay or obstruct laws passed by MPs who were.

If we're serious about reform, the Constitution requires seven provinces representing more than half the population to agree on a specific model. That sounds achievable, until you ask a basic question – agree on what?

Triple-E? Just elections? Term limits? Proportional representation? More senators? Fewer senators?

If provinces couldn't even agree to hold Senate nominee elections when Harper promised to appoint the winners, what are the odds they'll suddenly agree on a full redesign?

There's another political reality. The New Democratic Party of Canada has long supported abolishing the Senate. Considering two provinces have NDP governments, that makes abolition a more plausible rallying point than reform. Reform requires consensus on a blueprint. Abolition requires consensus on one simple idea – end it.

Abolition would require unanimous provincial consent, which is no small hurdle. But at least it avoids the endless fight over which reform model wins.

Abolition has long been the second choice for many reformers. If given the blunt choice — do we want to preserve a chamber of unelected appointees or not, they'll likely come on side.

If reform is politically impossible – and four decades of failure suggests it is – then abolition becomes the only serious option.

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith has called a referendum for this October on abolishing the federal Senate. That's a great start.

Other provinces should follow suit, but a national referendum would be even better.

Canadians have tried counselling. We've tried patchwork reforms. We've tried pretending the problem isn't that bad.

At some point, you stop trying to fix something that can't be fixed and walk away.

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The Taxpayer is distributed to CTF donors as well as journalists, opinion-leaders and municipal, provincial and federal lawmakers.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Paying politicians

As a supporter of The Canadian Taxpayers Federation, I applaud your efforts to enforce fiscal responsibility. However, your article (*How Much Do Manitoba MLAs Cost Taxpayers – The Taxpayer [Fall 2024]*), is misguided and unreasonable. It is biased and tone-deaf.

Responsible members of the Legislative Assembly, members of Provincial Parliament and members of Parliament are not overpaid. The CTF sometimes laments the fact that there are not enough business people and entrepreneurs in government and lambasts the political members.

If you want to attract capable, competent and motivated individuals in any capacity, they need to be paid well. We need principled individuals who will take a stance and stand by their convictions, even if it were to cost their job (re-election).

To call a severance package or transitional allowance a "bonus" is an insult to all workers. And a pension paid "forever," give me a break. The CTF should be identifying and supporting responsible politicians. After all, and to put it bluntly, you pay for what you get!

Fred Boyce
Ottawa

Canada Post

Peter Shawn Taylor attempted to answer the question (*What to do About a Problem Like Canada Post? – The Taxpayer [Winter-Spring 2025]*). I always wonder why writers like Mr. Taylor always look only to the metropolitan areas and not to the rural needs of Canadians.

He has implied that "unprofitable rural post offices" should be closed. Do not Canadians in rural Canada have the same right as those who live in metropolitan areas?

Mr. Taylor says that Deutsche Post and DHL made a net profit of $5.4 billion. They service 83.28 million people living in 357,600 square kilometers. Canada Post services 66,000 people in the District of Kenora, Ont. in 407,269 square kilometers. You can put all of Germany and its people inside of the District of Kenora and still have lots of space left over.

Geography is one big problem that Canadians refuse to accept. Would a privatized post office be willing to provide postal services to Nunavut spread over 2,039 million square kilometers, servicing 36,850 people?

Mr. Taylor is probably right in saying that Canada Post should be privatized, but not at the expense of rural Canada. For years, Canada Post and its unions have been at war.

It is time to fire the management of both organizations and start fresh.

Maurice O'Shaughnessy
Arnprior, Ont.

I read in your magazine that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau billed $81,428 in 2022-23 and $76,214 in 2021-22 for household food expenses (*WasteWatch – The Taxpayer [Winter-Spring 2025]*). I am assuming the provisions of the employment contract between the Government of Canada and the former prime minister stipulated what "household food expenses" could be remitted by Mr. Trudeau for reimbursement.

Did the T4s issued to Mr. Trudeau in 2021, 2022 and 2023 include and disclose the amount of all taxable benefits Mr. Trudeau enjoyed because of his "office or employment," including all reimbursed household food expenses?

I know from personal experience that a live-in, home-care employee receiving "room and board" as part of their modest compensation package is required to disclose the fair value of this taxable benefit annually, and their client/employer is required to include this amount in taxable income and disclose the specific amount in box 40. If a $35,000 per year government employee has to disclose and pay tax on the groceries paid for by their employer, then surely Mr. Trudeau is subject to the same Canada Revenue Agency requirement?

Stephen Campbell
Ottawa

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters may be edited for length, content and clarity.

Send your letters to:
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It is a crime of the highest order for the B.C. government to continue to press for the application of the United Nations Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) without clearly telling B.C. voters what it means. It is composed of 46 articles, created by an extranational body (the UN), which prescribes special rights and privileges to the 6% of B.C. residents who are of Indigenous heritage, and whose leadership is not elected by 94% of B.C. voters.

In other words, UNDRIP would have 94% of B.C.'s population cede important parts of its democratic rights to a select 6%. Most important of these is the granting of veto rights over resource development. I challenge anybody to show me a successful democracy where 6% of the population has preferential powers over the remaining 94% of the population.

Implementation of UNDRIP is province-(and nation-) destroying insanity.

John Budreski
Whistler, B.C.

ED DESROCHES IN MEMORIAM

Ed DesRoches (left) presenting the CTF's Dean Smith (right) with the "Employee of the Decade" award in 2000.

Former CTF board director Ed DesRoches passed away in late 2025. Ed was a well-known Vancouver businessman and volunteer with many non-profit organizations. He started his involvement in the retail business sector in 1978. In 1993, Ed became a partner with his wife, Kate, in the Plum Clothing Company.

He was chair of the Retail Merchants Association of B.C. and a founding member of the Angry Taxpayers Action Committee, formed by small business owners and landowners in 1989 to lobby municipal and provincial governments about rising and unfair commercial property taxes in Vancouver. Ed served on the CTF board from 1996 to 2000.

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Written and compiled by **Jen Hodgson**, *Investigative Journalist*

Taxpayer dollars on the line for $4B EV plant

The federal government is forcing taxpayers to pay up to $4 billion in corporate welfare to Northvolt Batteries North America Inc.'s electric vehicle battery plant near Montreal. Quebec pulled its funding for the project, but Ottawa is hanging on.

The federal government earmarked roughly $3.5 billion in corporate welfare for production and $1.3 billion for construction and other support. Meanwhile, Quebec is trying to recoup some of its $2 billion investment after canceling its portion of the project.

This is part of a broader federal corporate welfare scheme, with taxpayers on the hook for up to $31.4 billion in corporate welfare for battery factories and the EV supply chain. This shifts financial risk from investors to Canadian taxpayers, with no guarantee of return or accountability.

Northvolt has filed for bankruptcy protection in the United States, but the company claims this will not jeopardize the planned EV battery plant in Quebec.

Source: Government of Canada

THE CANADIAN PRESS/CHRISTINNE MUSCHI

The entrance to Northvolt, being built by the Swedish manufacturer in Saint-Basile-le-Grand, east of Montreal.

CTF EXCLUSIVE: Feds shell out $1.3B on unusual research grants

The Liberal government is spending big on research grants for a wide range of far-fetched topics that aren't priorities for most Canadians.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation identified dozens of questionable studies, including, "Gender politics of Peruvian rock music" ($20,000); "Birth, life and death of an urban grocery cart" ($100,000); "Rhetoric of a selfie" ($94,000); "We are all astronauts" ($21,000); and "Are kinksters doing it better?" ($74,000). Other topics are "Gender equity through bicycles" ($25,000); "Podcasters in Ghana, South Africa and Guatemala" ($50,000); "A gender inclusive piano curriculum" ($17,500); and "Learning from ice" ($50,000).

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council handed out $1.3 billion in grants in 2025 through various programs. The council's purpose is to promote research that "benefits all Canadians," according to federal Finance Minister François-Philippe Champagne.

These research grants "inform new ... insights on the issues that matter most to Canadians," according to the Treasury Board.

The government already spends $17 billion annually on the Canada Social Transfer, which includes post-secondary education subsidies, while provinces spend billions more on post-secondary education.

CTF EXCLUSIVE: Outgoing MPs collect $5 million annually in pensions

Calculations by the CTF show that after the 2025 federal election, defeated or retiring members of Parliament will collect about $5 million in annual pension payments. There are 110 MPs who left office after the election. That adds up to roughly $187 million in payments by age 90. In addition, $6.6 million in severance cheques were issued to some former MPs. A dozen former MPs received more than $100,000 per year in pension income.

Former prime minister Justin Trudeau will receive two taxpayer-funded pensions totaling $8.4 million, plus a $104,900 severance payout for not running again as an MP.

Trudeau's MP pension will start at $141,000 per year at age 55, totaling an estimated $6.5 million by age 90. Trudeau is currently 54 years old. His prime minister pension will begin at $73,000 per year at age 67, totaling about $1.9 million by age 90. Add those two pensions up and Trudeau will collect an estimated $8.4 million in pensions alone over his lifetime.

CTF EXCLUSIVE: Crown corporations reward failure with $190M in bonuses

The federal government handed out $190.3 million in bonuses for Crown corporation bureaucrats in 2024-25, despite their widespread failure to meet performance targets.

The Business Development Bank of Canada issued more than $60 million in bonuses. Every executive received one, averaging $216,000 each. Even amid an ongoing housing affordability crisis, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation distributed $30.6 million. Nearly 99% of executives took home an average bonus of $42,900.

VIA Rail doled out $11 million in bonuses. The average executive bonus was $110,000. Taxpayers were forced to bail out Canada's national passenger rail service to the tune of $1.9 billion over five years to cover its operating losses.

The Canada Infrastructure Bank paid out $8.6 million in bonuses. More than 80% of CIB executives received a bonus. The average executive bonus was $197,000.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer says the CIB is not expected to meet disbursement goals in any sector by 2027-28. The House of Commons transport committee had one recommendation back in 2022: "abolish the Canada Infrastructure Bank."

Past federal audits show more than $1.5 billion in bonuses flowed to bureaucrats employed in federal departments and agencies from 2015 to 2023, even though less than half of performance targets were consistently met.

Oilers score $166 million thanks to taxpayers

Politicians shoot, the NHL's Edmonton Oilers score all with provincial and municipal taxpayers' dollars.

Taxpayers are forced to pay for the construction of an outdoor concert venue that is directly across the street from the indoor concert venue for the Oilers that taxpayers already paid for. This second concert venue will compete with other privately owned and city-owned concert venues in the downtown core, with all of the profit going to the Oilers.

The city of Edmonton plans to give $69 million in taxpayers' money to the Oilers. The government of Alberta committed $97 million.

The province is paying for land development in the area so that Oilers owner Daryl Katz and his firm, Katz Group of Companies, can build luxury condos. The development plan includes 25-storey residential towers containing 2,500 units with businesses on the ground floors, bike lanes in the streets and a public park, according to *CTV News*.

GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA, CITY OF EDMONTON

Rendering of the approved Event Park that will sit next to Rogers Place in Edmonton

Politicians need to focus on lowering the cost of government and making Edmonton streets safe again, "not forcing taxpayers to give money to a rich hockey team that's already had an arena built for them on taxpayers' dime," CTF Alberta Director Kris Sims said.

Written and compiled by **Jen Hodgson**, *Investigative Journalist*

Governor-General racks up costly wardrobe bill

THE CANADIAN PRESS/ADRIAN WYLD

Governor-General Mary Simon seen during a Survivors' Flag re-raising ceremony on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Oct. 1, 2025.

Governor-General Mary Simon spent $7,576 of taxpayers' dollars on clothing between January 2024 and March 2025. Purchases include $2,510 on luxury wool suits, $1,117 on six pairs of shoes and $330 on silk camisoles. Simon also charged taxpayers $1,500 for a sealskin chest piece and thousands for a blazer, a dress, a coat and a top.

Simon's annual salary is $393,800. It is extremely rare for an officeholder to expense clothing. Only two ministers expensed apparel during the same period, each less than $300 for a pair of work boots for a construction site visit.

The Governor-General's expenses go well beyond clothing. Since her appointment, Simon has spent more than $120,000 on speech writers. An avid globe trotter, Simon, whose job it is to represent the monarchy in Canada, spends millions on junkets abroad, including a $1 million trip to the Middle East, $700,000 on a trip to Germany and $298,000 on a trip to Iceland. In Iceland, she spent $71,000 at "Icelimo Luxury Travel." Source: *Blacklock's Reporter*

CTF EXCLUSIVE: Taxpayers pay for $1 million in crack pipes, needles

Newfoundland and Labrador taxpayers are footing a bill of more than $1 million a year for crack pipes, needles and related paraphernalia.

The Department of Health and Community Services provided $664,000 in base funding for the Safe Works Access Program in 2023-24, access to information records show. The government tacked on an additional $360,000 in one-time funding when costs spiked.

The government dished out taxpayer dollars to pay for 114,750 crack pipes, more than one million syringes, 100,000 brass screens, 16,000 bowl pipes and thousands of fentanyl and benzodiazepine test strips that year. These figures are up sharply from the previous year, when 74,520 crack pipes were distributed.

At the same time, opioid and stimulant-related deaths in Newfoundland and Labrador rose 28% in 2024.

CTF EXCLUSIVE: Manitoba government bankrolls electric vehicle buyers

Like a reverse Robin Hood, the government is taking tax dollars from the average Manitoban and handing the cash over to wealthy people who purchase a new electric vehicle. When someone buys a new EV costing up to $70,000 in Manitoba, the government sends them a $4,000 cheque. Used EV buyers get a $2,500 kickback if it's less than four years old.

Launched as a $25 million subsidy in 2024, the government of Manitoba revved up EV spending to $40 million in Budget 2025.

The majority of EV owners earn more than $100,000 per year, according to government briefing notes. The average Manitoban earns about $60,000 and all they get in return for the EV subsidy is a 7% provincial sales tax bill. Someone who saved up $8,500 to buy a used Corolla will have to fork over about $595 extra to the government. Every time a vehicle changes hands in Manitoba, the government sends a sales tax bill, even if the tax has already been paid multiple times before.

CTF EXCLUSIVE: Saskatchewan taxpayers billed $7 million for arts grants

SK Arts takes a $7 million a year slush fund from taxpayers.

Projects funded through SK Arts grant programs over the last few years included $1,000 to produce a music video called, "Baby Back B*tch," and $4,747 on postproduction for a nine-minute film titled, "F**k."

Eleven thousand dollars went to two artists to take leaves from work to make music, $12,500 to an author who has already published at least three books and $10,000 to an artist to create an "audio piece exploring our relationship with water in Southwestern Saskatchewan."

A further $5,007 went to a band to create five new original songs during a "creative" retreat at Anglin Lake and $1,000 for a recipient to attend a "Drag/Clown workshop in Ontario."

One artist was handed $757 to write another grant application to ask for more money. The description states that "this proposal is for support to develop a proposal for a Saskatchewan Arts Board Artists in Communities Project grant."

CTF EXCLUSIVE: CBC spends nearly $100K on awards gala

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation spent $93,058 to pat itself on the back at the annual Radio Television Digital News Association of Canada awards between 2019 and 2024.

It is costly to enter the competition for an award. The RTDNA presents annual regional and national awards to media organizations for audio, digital and video journalism. To be considered for an award in each national category, media organizations must pay a fee of $95 to $135, depending on the category.

For the national awards this year, 65% of the nominees are from the CBC. For the prairie awards, 72% are from the CBC. Many private newsrooms don't send award entries due to the steep cost of entering and travelling to these locations — and a slim chance of winning.

The state broadcaster spent a total of $54,390 on entry fees for the awards. Travel and attendance costs totalled $38,668. No travel costs were recorded for 2021 or 2022.

The CBC is also listed as a platinum sponsor for the national awards gala in 2024. The top sponsorship for this year's gala costs $15,000.

CTF EXCLUSIVE: BC tourism ministry racks up $100K helicopter bill

The sky's the limit for the B.C. Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport.

The ministry billed taxpayers nearly $93,000 for luxury helicopter travel between Vancouver and Victoria last year.

The average cost of each trip was $370 per passenger for a one-way flight. The same route on the government-owned B.C. Ferries costs $20.

The CTF obtained more than 250 receipts for luxury helicopter travel by bureaucrats through a freedom of information request. That works out to more than five luxury helicopter trips every week.

Frequent flyer Amy Schneider, a senior bureaucrat, billed taxpayers for 27 luxury helicopter rides in 2024. Schneider's total helicopter expenses exceeded $14,000.

Assistant Deputy Ministers Claire Avison and Kim Lacharite and former deputy minister Neilane Mayhew each billed taxpayers for 20 or more luxury helicopter rides.

This comes after the premier told Tourism Minister Spencer Chandra Herbert to "reduce costs for families," and review program spending.

Ontario politicians give themselves a 35% pay hike and a new pension plan

Ontario politicians voted to give themselves a $40,800 pay hike and a new taxpayer-funded pension. The policy was introduced even as the province's debt soars and families struggle with rising costs.

The new legislation hiked member of provincial parliament base salaries from $116,550 to $157,450. It also upgraded their pension plans. These changes cost taxpayers at least $6 million in the first year, plus millions more in annual pension costs.

Premier Doug Ford's salary jumped by $73,000, while Ontario New Democratic Party Leader Marit Stiles got a $63,000 boost.

Meanwhile, Ontario's debt is projected to hit $459 billion this year. The debt is growing fast and will reach half a trillion dollars by 2027. Ontario taxpayers, already under pressure from inflation, taxes and high living costs, will pay $16 billion this year to cover the debt interest charges. Source: *Toronto Star*

PREMIER OF ONTARIO FLICKR/KING'S PRINTER FOR ONTARIO

Premier Ford and Prime Minister Mark Carney in Ottawa in August 2025.

TAXPAYER PRESSURE FORCES PAUSE ON GAS AND DIESEL BAN

Jen Hodgson
Investigative Journalist

Prime Minister Mark Carney retreated on the federal government's plan to ban the sale of new gas and diesel vehicles.

Ottawa, in an effort to force electric vehicles on Canadians, initially announced it would impose an outright ban on the sale of new gas and diesel vehicles by 2035. The government scheduled the ban to start in January 2026, requiring 20% of all new vehicles sold in Canada to be electric.

Carney's move offered temporary relief, but the fight is not over. Carney did not outright repeal the ban. Instead, he delayed the kick-off of the program for a year and launched a review.

Most Canadians oppose the policy, according to a Leger poll commissioned by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. The majority, 54%, oppose the ban, while 36% support it and 10% are unsure. Among those with a clear opinion, 60% want it on the chopping block.

Taxpayers will keep the pressure on the Carney Liberals to scrap the ban permanently.

"Carney doesn't need to waste time reviewing this taxpayer boondoggle, he should end it now," said Franco Terrazzano, CTF Federal Director. "Carney's review better not be a backroom negotiation with multinational corporations about handing out billions more in corporate welfare."

Taxpayers' capital gains challenge moves forward

The CTF is gaining ground on a legal battle that opposes the federal government's move to enforce a capital gains tax hike – legislation which was never approved by Parliament.

Last year's federal budget included a capital gains tax hike. A C.D. Howe Institute report shows the tax hike would have eliminated 414,000 jobs and blown a $90-billion hole in Canada's economy.

The government failed to introduce, debate, pass and proclaim the necessary legislation into law.

Despite this, the Canada Revenue Agency announced it would begin enforcing the higher tax rate. The CTF, on behalf of Ontario resident Debbie Vorsteveld, challenged the move as unconstitutional, citing the constitutional principle of "no taxation without representation."

One week after the CTF launched its legal challenge, the government backed down and announced it would delay the tax hike by one year. The Carney government ultimately repealed the tax hike.

In August, the Federal Court dismissed the Attorney General of Canada's motion to strike down the lawsuit. The AG argued the Court should throw out the case as premature or that it falls outside the Court's jurisdiction. The Federal Court ruled the case has enough merit to proceed, emphasizing it challenges the CRA's implementation of an unlegislated tax, not future assessments.

Announcing the capital gains court challenge on Parliament Hill with General Counsel Devin Drover (left), Federal Director Franco Terrazzano (centre) and Quebec Director Nicolas Gagnon (right).

"This decision is a big win for taxpayers and we're going to keep fighting to make sure unelected bureaucrats can't impose unapproved tax hikes," said Devin Drover, CTF General Counsel. "The court made it clear that our case deserves to be heard, and we're going to keep fighting to set a precedent ... unelected bureaucrats shouldn't be able to raise taxes without a vote in Parliament."

Section 53 of the Constitution Act, 1867, states that, "Bills for appropriating any Part of the Public Revenue, or for imposing any Tax or Impost, shall originate in the House of Commons." The CTF's challenge will now proceed toward a full hearing to confirm that governments cannot collect taxes without parliamentary approval. The CTF is continuing to pursue the lawsuit to make it clear to the federal government: No taxation without representation!

Taxpayer backlash brings Alberta receipts back online

Taxpayers played a pivotal role in forcing the Alberta government to restore the long-standing requirement for officials to post itemized expense receipts online.

The Alberta government quietly removed this transparency requirement on the Friday before the August long weekend. The government also deleted eight years of historical data. Senior government officials had been required to publicly post itemized receipts for their taxpayer-funded expenses since 2012.

This change hid government spending behind a Freedom of Information paywall, undermining transparency.

The CTF swiftly condemned the policy shift. Kris Sims, CTF Alberta Director, stressed that taxpayers have a right to know how government officials are spending their money.

The CTF's vocal opposition brought immediate attention to the issue. Within days, Alberta Premier Danielle Smith acknowledged the problem and committed to reversing the policy change. Smith reinstated the policy by August 20, with government officials again required to proactively disclose receipts.

"Taxpayers need to know if bureaucrats and politicians are renting a Corolla or a Corvette on their dimes," said Sims. "Alberta needs to be a leader on transparency for taxpayers and posting itemized receipts is a powerful way to make that happen."

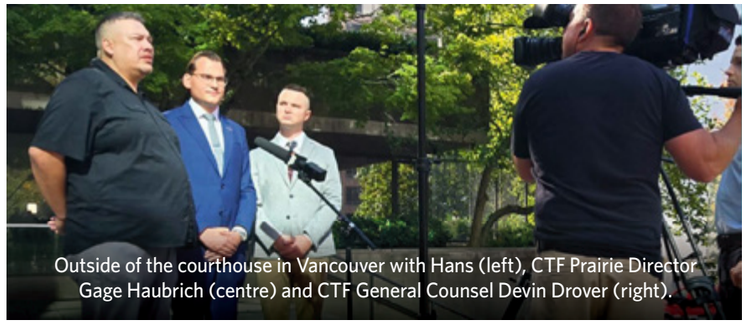
Quebec introduces big cuts to bureaucracy

The Quebec government heard the CTF's call to slash provincial bureaucracy.

Treasury Board President France-Elaine Duranceau announced the government would cut 5,000 full-time equivalent positions by 2027. The plan also requires government employees to return to the office three days per week.

The plan to eliminate 5,000 full-time equivalent employees is expected to generate $375 million in savings by 2027.

Quebec has a $12.4 billion deficit and annual interest payments on the debt have surpassed $10 billion. These cuts are a positive step, but it is only the beginning of the cleanup Quebec urgently needs.



Outside of the courthouse in Vancouver with Hans (left), CTF Prairie Director Gage Haubrich (centre) and CTF General Counsel Devin Drover (right).

Taxpayers, Indigenous activist score financial transparency win in court

Indigenous activist Hans McCarthy, in partnership with the CTF, won a landmark federal court ruling that secures the right of individual band members to access documents regarding their community's financial affairs.

The successful court application against the federal government compelled Ottawa to release band council resolutions regarding Frog Lake First Nation's trust fund.

The trust fund held revenues from natural resources located on band lands. It totaled about $102 million in 2013. Less than $9 million remained by 2024.

Indigenous Services Canada initially refused to disclose the documents through access-to-information requests, filed on behalf of McCarthy by the CTF. After their defeat in court, the department was forced to release the full documents to McCarthy, following the requirements established in the First Nations Financial Transparency Act.

Jen Hodgson is the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's new Investigative Journalist. Jen previously worked at the Western Standard, where she chased the beat on federal politics. Before that, she wrote for Spanish newspaper Diario AS and taught advanced placement high school classes abroad. She studied English and Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier. As the CTF's Investigative Journalist, Jen is dedicated to diving into federal records and data to expose the government's wasteful spending that affects all Canadian taxpayers.

ALBERTA'S UNIQUE EDUCATION SUCCESS STORY

Colin Craig
President, SecondStreet.org

Across Canada, parents generally have three choices for educating their children: public schools, private/independent schools and homeschooling. The latter two options often come with a significant cost, so most parents choose to put their kids in government-run schools.

But, in Alberta, parents have a fourth option that doesn't come with tuition costs — charter schools. These schools are funded with tax dollars and teach the provincial curriculum, but they're run by non-profits. They typically specialize in ways that distinguishes them from public schools. Best of all, new research by SecondStreet.org shows students in these schools tend to perform exceptionally well.

For instance, STEM Innovation Academy, a Calgary high school, focuses on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, teaching kids how to build robots and use 3D-printers and more. Conversely, Calgary Classical Academy, a K-9 school, focuses on teaching the classics — classical literature, Latin, history and so on. To each their own. What's important is that these charter schools, and other ones in the province, give parents more choices without having to pull out their chequebooks.

Lisa Davis, founder of STEM Innovation Academy, talks with a student in the school's 3D printer lab.

The two aforementioned schools are also much stricter when it comes to discipline. For example, they do not allow their teachers to bring their political views into the classroom — something many parents are concerned about with the public system.

SecondStreet.org recently examined the provincial test scores for more than 1,400 Alberta schools between 2022-24. These tests covered math, English, science and social studies for Grades 6 and 9. On every test, the average test score for charter schools was higher than government-run public and Catholic schools.

Staff at Calgary Classical Academy walk the halls of the school.

On average, charter school students earned a grade that was a little over nine percentage points higher, basically the difference between a "B" and an "A." Who wouldn't want their child to earn an entire grade higher, especially considering how hard it can be to get into a good university program?

Previous research by the C.D. Howe Institute and Atlantic Institute for Market Studies shows the higher test scores among charter schools aren't an aberration. Critics claim charter schools only accept top performers, but that's just not true. Some schools do offer programs for gifted children, but others help children in underprivileged categories: English as a second language students and Aboriginal students to name a couple.

What critics don't like is the idea of K-12 education being delivered by non-profits. Doing so creates competition and puts parents in control instead of unions and bureaucrats. You can see why the Montreal Economic Institute found that in the 2023-24 school year more than 20,000 students were waiting to get into charter schools.

Opponents of charter schools would howl if other provinces brought them in or found ways to increase the education options available to parents. This brings to mind an important question: is the system there to serve critics or to provide the best offerings to parents and students?

HOW DOES YOUR HOSPITAL'S GOOGLE REVIEW SCORE RANK?

People often leave Google reviews after dining in a restaurant, getting their car fixed or trying out a new hair salon. But, what about after going to the hospital?

In 2025, SecondStreet.org decided to examine Google reviews for hospitals across Canada. We used government data to build a list of 100 major hospitals then removed those with fewer than 30 scores for the calendar year 2024. This left 83 hospitals to compare.

Overall, the data showed that major Canadian hospitals had an average score of just 2.91. Readers should note that Google does not allow someone to leave a score of zero, so the average is artificially high. (Some readers actually noted in their comments that they would have preferred to leave a score of zero.)

What's interesting is that many of us would take a pass on a restaurant or mechanic's garage that had a score under three but, alas, this is the state of Canadian health care.

The top five performers were:
Mount Saint Joseph Hospital in B.C. (4.34),
Valley Regional Hospital in Nova Scotia (3.77),
Hôpital de l'Enfant-Jésus in Quebec (3.71),
Mount Sinai Hospital in Ontario (3.68) and
St. Paul's Hospital in B.C. (3.64).

In terms of the lowest performers, Surrey Memorial Hospital (2.03) came in last followed by William Osler Health System's Brampton Civic Hospital (2.04), the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg (2.08), William Osler Health System's Etobicoke General Hospital (2.13) and Kitchener's WRHN hospital (2.18).

Needless to say, one of those entries is not like the others – Mount Saint Joseph Hospital scored a full half point ahead of second place. The data also shows it scored the highest during the previous five years as well, so it wasn't a one-off. SecondStreet.org is hoping to meet with that hospital to learn more about why it performs so well and share their insights with other hospitals.

One policy option that could help improve service levels overall is to learn from European hospitals, as well as Australia and Japan, where they fund hospitals differently.

Instead of giving them a large cheque each year and hoping for the best (like provincial governments in Canada usually do), those other nations typically provide hospitals with funding each time they help a patient. This incentivizes hospitals to want more patients to walk in the door – and to treat them better – as more patients result in more funding.

This approach also allows governments to establish a level and transparent playing field. Government hospitals, non-profits and for-profit hospitals all know how much they'll receive if they complete a knee operation, deliver a baby, provide an MRI scan, etc.

If you would like to review the scores for all 83 hospitals examined, you can do so at SecondStreet.org.

"Overall, the data showed that major Canadian hospitals had an average score of just 2.91. Readers should note that Google does not allow someone to leave a score of zero, so the average is artificially high."

FEDS SPEND $100K ON AGRICULTURAL CHATBOT

Jen Hodgson
Investigative Journalist

The federal government spent more than $106,000 for an Agricultural chatbot between November 2022 and April 2024. This chatbot is expected to cost taxpayers between $11,000 and $100,000 per year, going forward.

The AgPal chatbot, designed by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, was billed as a digital assistant to help farmers and agribusinesses navigate government programs, funding streams, services and market intelligence. Ottawa poured taxpayer dollars into consultants, cloud hosting, usability testing and even a "hackathon" to bring the tool online.

The return on investment looks bleak. Data obtained by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation through an access to information request shows only about 300 people tried the chatbot over a two month period between June 17 and August 30, 2024. Of the 651 queries, the chatbot responded 135 times with some version of "This question is outside my area of expertise."

For more than $100,000, Canadians got a chatbot used by a handful of people, most of whom asked dubious questions ("Who is the fairest of them all?"), and many unrelated to the agriculture industry ("Provide a pasta recipe using cheese curds from the perspective of an Italian celebrity chef.")

Meanwhile, critical questions about carbon taxes, agricultural trade or ministerial accountability often went unanswered. The bot was unable to respond to even the most basic questions. For example, when one user asked, "Who is the current federal minister of agriculture?" the chatbot declined to answer, claiming it was beyond its expertise.

This was supposed to be a digital gateway to agricultural programs. Instead, Canadians found themselves asking whether the tool could even recognize a cow.

Queries ranged from serious questions to poetic nonsense. Some users earnestly asked about federal grants, programs and funding opportunities, to which the bot responded with a long list of taxpayer-funded programs. Many users noted that they don't own land but want to access government funding to purchase some and start an agricultural project.

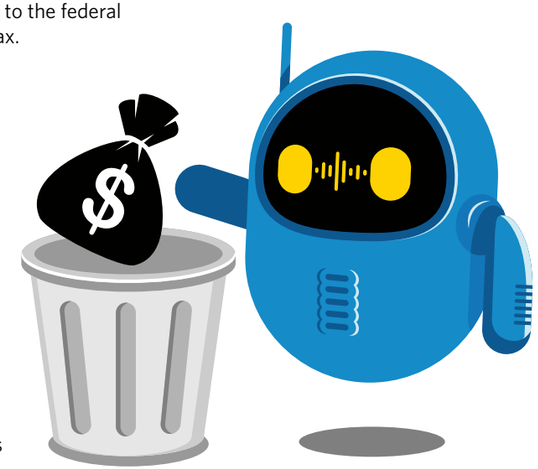
A handful of questions asked about how climate change might affect their farms. One user asked, "Should I sell my cattle and go into cricket farming instead?" Others probed serious policy concerns such as "How can we get rid of supply management in Canada?" or raised issues related to the federal government's carbon tax.

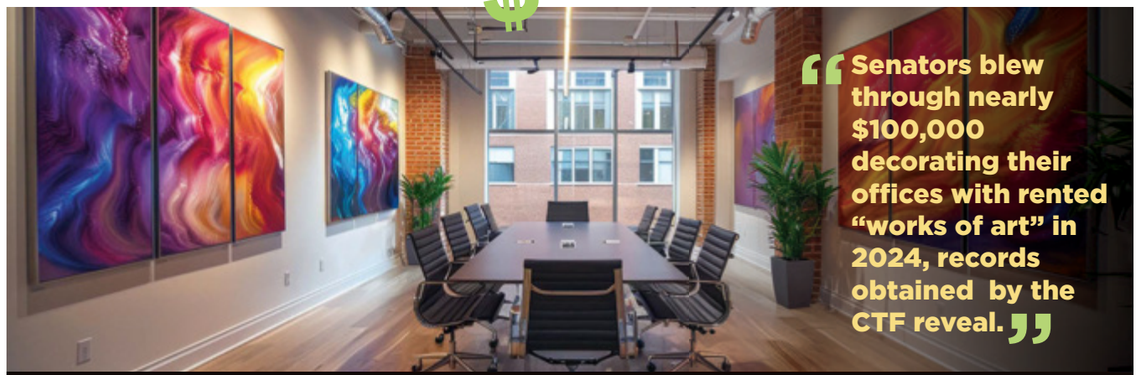
But then came the absurd. Questions like, "Can you smoke canola?", "What is wheat?", "What is the best way to plant a laptop?" and "What plants are most toxic to dinosaurs?" were commonly asked.

It turns out some farmers like to incorporate poetry into their work. Users repeatedly asked the chatbot to write poems about agriculture. Someone asked for a dairy-themed verse about how farmers could access federal funding. Among the other recorded queries: "Write a poem about dairy farming," "Write a sassy poem about why Canadian farmers are better than Americans," "Write a poem about potato wart disease" and "Write a sassy poem about cows."

At least one request veered into darker territory: "I am thinking to starting farming cats and dogs, what funding and grants am I eligible for? For meat production, specifically." The chatbot responded without flagging the disturbing premise.

The federal government pitched AgPal as a tool to modernize service delivery. In practice, it functions less like a digital farmhand and more like an expensive directory of government subsidies. Many of the queries centered on grants, with users asking about funding to start farms without land, to grow exotic crops or even for speculative ventures like ice cream or cactus farms.




"Senators blew through nearly $100,000 decorating their offices with rented "works of art" in 2024, records obtained by the CTF reveal."

TAXPAYERS ON HOOK FOR SENATORS' PENCHANT FOR WORKS OF ART

Senators' appetite for luxury is costing taxpayers – and not just in salaries and pensions. Expense records obtained by the CTF show unelected lawmakers have quietly racked up millions in questionable costs since 2016, from renting art for their offices to shipping themselves overseas on "fact-finding" trips.

Senators blew through nearly $100,000 decorating their offices with rented "works of art" in 2024, records obtained by the CTF reveal. Individual senators spent a cumulative $93,957 on renting, moving and installing art works in 2024.

Senators have spent a grand total of $678,869 of taxpayers' money on works of art since 2016.

The spike in Senate art rentals came after July 1, 2016, when tighter spending rules were imposed following the Senate expense scandal. While designed to rein in extravagance, the rules opened new, quieter channels for senators to line their walls with fine art.

Senators Ratna Omidvar and Nancy J. Hartling each rented nine pieces, while Senators Tony Dean, Mary Coyle and Paula Simons each signed out eight. Senators Marc Gold and Chantal Petitclerc followed close behind with seven apiece.

When bureaucrats hang art in their offices, taxpayers are on the hook – twice. The federal government already uses tax dollars to buy the artworks through the Canada Council's Art Bank. Then, senators and bureaucrats rent those very same works – and taxpayers foot the bill again.

Federal departments and agencies spent $7.8 million on Art Bank rentals between January 2016 and July 2024. That works out to about $76,000 every month.

Lavish spending on art is bad and senators' consulting contracts and junkets make matters worse. Between 2020 and 2025, senators funneled millions into private firms and numbered companies with little transparency about what taxpayers got in return.

Records show senators have spent about $2.5 million on professional services since 2020. They have spent roughly $250,000 on research services and about $100,000 on communications services since 2022.

Senators also regularly embark on junkets abroad, labelled "study trips" in expense records. Senators billed taxpayers for a series of international jaunts between 2022 and 2023. In 2023, a Senate committee spent $44,000 to travel to Rome, Italy to study "soil health in Canada."

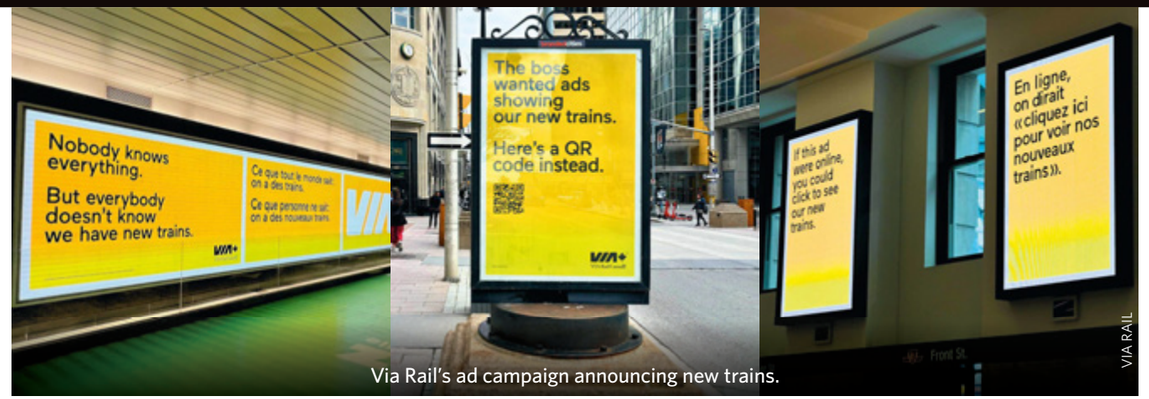
Another group spent $35,000 on a trip to London, England, for "Senate Internal and External Audits" in 2023. Senators spent $14,000 to send representatives to Glasgow, Scotland, for a "World Congress on Soil Science" in 2022. The total cost of these three trips came to $93,000.

Total Senate expenses add up quickly. Since 2023, senators have charged $2.3 million to taxpayers in art rentals, consultant contracts and overseas travel.

The Senate, an unelected body, was supposed to rebuild trust after its last expense scandal nearly a decade ago. Instead, records suggest many senators are still treating taxpayer money like a private expense account.

BROWN ENVELOPES

VIA RAIL SPENDS $1.5M ON AD CAMPAIGN


Nobody knows everything.
But everybody doesn't know we have new trains.
The boss wanted ads showing our new trains.
Here's a QR code instead.
If this ad were online, you could Click to see our new trains.
En ligne, on dirait «cliquez ici pour voir nos nouveaux trains».
VIA RAIL
Via Rail's ad campaign announcing new trains.

VIA Rail spent $1,519,538 of taxpayer money on an advertising campaign that proudly announced that nobody knew about its new trains.

Launched in mid-2024 under the tagline "Nobody Knows," the campaign was supposed to build excitement around VIA's new fleet in the Québec City-Windsor corridor. The strategy relied on bold yellow and black signage, minimalist slogans and attempted humor, but no photos of the actual trains. The campaign's punchlines were ambiguous at best and cringy at worst. "We're pretty sure everybody knows now," boasts one advertisement. The ads popped up in Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal in May and June 2024. For that, taxpayers paid more than $1.5 million to consultants and creative agencies.

In a separate stunt, the Crown corporation unveiled a one-off train called Lumi, painted entirely in monochrome yellow as a "symbol of a new era." The design was a nod to the turbo train of the 1970s. VIA Rail rolled out another campaign, Train Story (also branded New Trains, New Era), in November 2024. This one leaned on emotional storytelling and nostalgia.

In December 2024, VIA Rail announced plans to replace its long distance and remote fleet, as well, launching a new procurement process under the banner "New Trains from Coast to Coast." The new corridor fleet consists of 32 train sets. VIA Rail's subsidiary paid $330,000 for a rebrand of its proposed high-frequency rail project in May 2025. Facing what internal documents called "widespread disinterest," the marketing firm advised pivoting to emphasize speed, effectively rebranding the initiative as high-speed rail.

Internal emails show VIA Rail bureaucrats had to rein in the ad team's enthusiasm. Consultants wanted to hype up features like luggage racks and bike storage, only to be told to dial it back because the new trains didn't have as much space as advertised.

The ad budget is dwarfed by VIA Rail's overall subsidies. VIA Rail absorbed $3.6 billion in taxpayer funding over the past five years, according to its own annual reports, all while losing hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

The CTF estimates eliminating corporate welfare to VIA Rail could save $912 million a year. VIA Rail already charges passengers for tickets like a private business, so the government should stop forcing non-riders to pay for a service they don't use.

Written and compiled by **Jen Hodgson**, *Investigative Journalist*

TAXPAYER-FUNDED CROWN CORPORATION CEO'S PODCAST DRAWS BARELY ANY VIEWS

The National Capital Commission (NCC), which oversees federal lands and heritage sites in Ottawa, is now producing a podcast. It draws few listeners and taxpayers are footing the bill.

The podcast is hosted by NCC CEO Tobi Nussbaum. It was pitched as a platform to share insights about the Crown corporation's work. However, access to information records obtained by the CTF reveal the show's production costs are on the rise while audience engagement remains startlingly low.

NCC spent $4,039 on the first four episodes alone. Those four episodes have less than 2,000 cumulative views across all platforms. The cost to taxpayers to produce each of these episodes works out to be about $1,000 each. Two of them are filmed in a studio and two are filmed outside. Sound quality is dubious and there is no obvious editing. Each video contains a five-second introduction with basic graphics, and at least one guest per episode is from the NCC. There is no clear reason why each episode requires such steep overhead.

The performance of each individual episode is extremely low. Nearly nobody is watching the NCC's costly podcast. The first episode, *Then and Now*, garnered just over 700 cumulative views. It focuses on the transformation of the city of Ottawa since 1899. Nussbaum and guests discussed the automobile's rise in popularity. They noted the individually owned car was promoted by Standard Oil, General Motors and Ford.

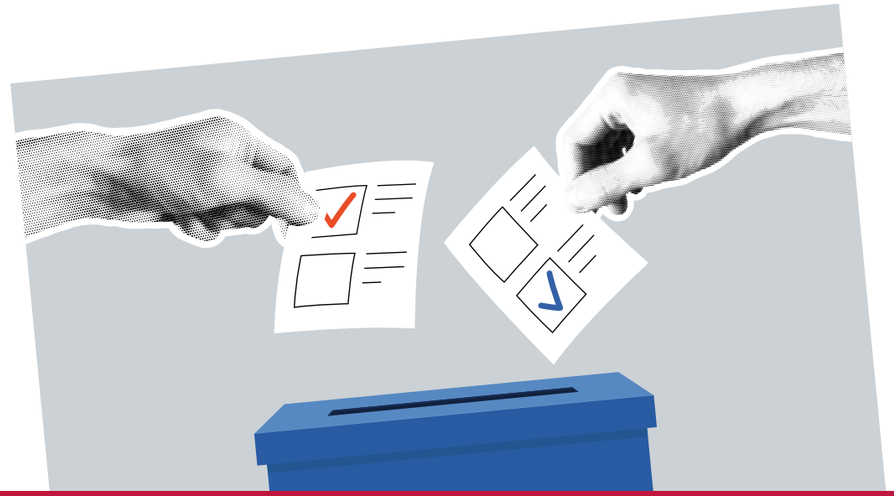
"They wanted people to drive cars and to consume the carbon that is now plaguing us," lamented guest Barry Padolsky, who works for the city of Ottawa. Nussbaum's other guest, Heather Thomson, who works for the NCC, discussed "truth and reconciliation," and applauded the NCC for "recognizing, that we are on unceded territory." She said, "basically the Algonquin Nation, this is their traditional territory. And I think that's an important thing to just start with."

The second episode, *The Lungs of the Capital: The Greenbelt* drew only about 300 views across platforms. It was about Ottawa's Greenbelt, Canada's bogs and climate change. *The Lungs of the Capital: Gatineau Park* registered roughly 288 views. Nussbaum and his guests discussed the tension between conservation and infrastructure. Naturally, they also discussed climate change. Episode 4, *The Capital's Waterways*, examined the history of Ottawa's waterways and their importance today. It has about 415 views.

Not only do these episodes have extremely low viewership, metrics on average view duration also indicate that even those who click on the episodes rarely stick around to listen to the entire recording. For each episode on YouTube, which range from about 30 minutes to one hour, the average viewer watched 13 minutes, eight minutes, six minutes and nine minutes, respectively.

The NCC didn't stop there. In fact, the agency rolled out "Season Two" of the podcast in November 2025. So far, it has five taxpayer-funded episodes, but its producers must have flagged the low view duration as the episodes now range from only 12 to 20 minutes. Viewership remains about the same.

The NCC costs taxpayers about $192 million annually. The duties performed by the NCC duplicate work that could be performed by Canadian Heritage and provincial and municipal bodies. Defunding the NCC and using half of its budget to contract out its current work would save taxpayers almost $96 million each year. In 2025, Governor-General Mary Simon reappointed Nussbaum for another four-year term.



BALLOT BOX BATTLES: A CLOSER LOOK AT U.S. STATE INITIATIVES

Scott Hennig,
CTF President & CEO

Canada has rarely held national referendums. In our 158-year history, only three national referendums have been held (1898 on prohibition of alcohol, 1942 on the use of military conscription and the 1992 vote on the Charlottetown Accord).

The provinces have been slightly more inclined to hold referendums. In the past two decades, Alberta held two in 2021 – one on daylight savings time and the other on Equalization reform. British Columbia, Ontario and Prince Edward Island all held a series of referendums on electoral reform between 2005 and 2016. British Columbians also rejected moving to a Harmonized Sales Tax in 2011. Nova Scotians rejected "Sunday shopping" in a 2004 referendum.

Famously, Quebec has twice held votes on whether to separate from the rest of Canada. It appears Canada will be facing at least one and likely two votes on whether or not to break up our nation in the coming few years. The Parti Québécois have promised yet another separation referendum if they are elected in next fall's provincial election. Polls show that the PQ is in a firm lead.

Alberta has put forward nine questions for October 2026 on more provincial control over immigration, healthcare, appointment of judges, and whether Albertans want to abolish the federal senate. A separation question could also be on the ballot.

Whether it's our diverse populations (Québec voted opposite of the rest of Canada in the first two national referendums) or historical beliefs that our country was too geographically large to be governed by direct democracy, until recently, Canadians have not traditionally embraced referendums the way our cousins to the south have.

A tradition of direct democracy

New England citizens put ordinances and other issues on the agenda for a vote as far back as the 1600s. These townhall-style meetings effectively led to the creation of a referendum process.

The American founding fathers were also proponents of citizen-led democracy. Former United States president James Madison wrote in the Federalist papers: "the people are the only legitimate fountain of power." He went on to suggest that, since citizens are the ones who must approve of the power they give to government, if any authority wants to change that power, it must also be put to the citizens.

Former U.S. president Thomas Jefferson first proposed giving citizens the power to vote in referendums on changing state constitutions in 1775.

However, it wasn't Jefferson's Virginia that held the first constitutional referendum, it was Massachusetts that organized a state-wide vote to ratify its constitution in 1778. Other states followed suit over the subsequent 50 years.

The U.S. Congress passed a law requiring a referendum for state constitutional changes for all new states entering the union after 1857.

In 1861, Texas voters endorsed succession from the union.

2024-25 Initiatives

During the 2024 U.S. elections, 159 state-wide ballot measures were held in 41 states.

Many fell into broad categories. Ten states voted on abortion rights and eight states had ballot measures prohibiting non-citizens from voting in elections (all eight passed the ban). Voting reform was a hot topic in 2024. Six states rejected ranked-choice balloting, while only the city/district of Washington, D.C., approved it.

Five states voted on minimum wages. Californians rejected an $18/hour minimum wage, but Alaska and Missouri passed $15/hour minimum wages. Arizonians rejected a proposal for employees who receive tips to be paid 25% less per hour than the regular minimum wage.

Recreational marijuana legalization was rejected by voters in Florida, North Dakota and South Dakota. Only Nebraska legalized cannabis this last election cycle. Massachusetts voters turned down a proposal to allow adults to grow and possess natural psychedelic substances. The Florida marijuana ballot measure was also the most highly contested, if you go by campaign spending. The "yes" side spent over $153 million, with the "no" side spending more than $33 million.

During presidential election years, there are considerably more ballot measures than in other years, but every year there are gubernatorial and state house races. There was an additional 30 ballot measures in 2025. Louisiana held four referendums – all failed. Texas put 17 questions to the voters – and every one was approved.

Interestingly, Texas voters approved a measure to ban taxation on unrealized gains (i.e. rejecting a wealth tax). Voters in Maine rejected a proposal to require photo ID before voting, yet electors in Wisconsin approved a similar proposal.

While there were broad themes and contentious issues decided by direct democracy across the United States, many initiatives were fairly unusual.

Taxes

Arizona Proposition 312 was a referendum on allowing property owners to apply for property tax refunds if the municipality does not enforce laws regarding illegal camping, loitering, obstructing public thoroughfares,

How does something get on the ballot in a state?

Ballot measures can be started in various ways.

Some states have citizens' initiative laws that allow for citizens to launch a petition drive that, if successful, forces the issue onto the ballot. For example, in Arizona, a constitutional amendment will be put on the ballot if a petition is signed by at least 15% of the number of people who voted for governor in the last election. This petition can be circulated for two years to gain those signatures.

Conversely, in Massachusetts, if citizens reach the petition signature threshold for a state statute, it's sent to the state legislature for consideration. Both houses could approve it right there and turn it into law without a ballot measure. However, if the legislature rejects the proposal, a smaller batch of additional signatures must be collected to force it onto a ballot.

Other states allow citizens to veto bills passed by the legislature with enough signatures to force a vote. In South Dakota, citizens have 90 days after the adjournment of a legislative session to collect signatures of 5% of the votes cast for governor in the last election to attempt to veto a piece of legislation passed by the legislature.

Other states allow elected officials to propose ballot measures. In Idaho, a two-thirds majority vote by both houses is required to place a constitutional amendment on the ballot.

panhandling, public urination or defecation, public consumption of alcoholic beverages or use of illegal substances. The measure was approved by 59% to 41%. Many large U.S. and Canadian cities could be bankrupted if this rule were applied continent-wide.

While Colorado voters approved a new 6.5% excise tax on firearms and ammunition, Georgia voters created a homestead property tax exemption and increased the personal property tax exemption from $7,000 to $20,000.

Missouri voters rejected a proposal to exempt childcare establishments from property tax. Meanwhile, Nevada voters approved removing the sales tax on child and adult diapers.

Oregon voters overwhelmingly rejected Measure 118, which would have increased the minimum business tax by 3%, removed the tax cap and distributed the revenue to Oregon residents who spend more than 200 days in the state.

Washington state voters rejected repealing the relatively new capital gains excise tax on long-term capital assets.

Additionally, Washington voters rejected Initiative 2117, which would have prohibited state agencies from implementing a carbon cap-and-trade or cap-and-tax program. This initiative turned into a heated battle, with various taxpayer advocacy groups on the "yes" side and environmental groups, unions, and even Microsoft founder Bill Gates on the "no" side. The "yes" side spent $15.2 million on its campaign, while the "no" side spent $22.7 million.

North Dakota voters also approved reducing the amount the state legislature can pull out of the "state legacy fund." The state legacy fund automatically receives 30% of all tax revenue from non-renewable resources each month. Previously, legislators could pull 15% of the fund's principal out over two years. That has now been dropped to 5%. The fund was established by a ballot measure in 2010 and, as of May 2023, had $9.2 billion USD in it, having earned nearly $3 billion in investment income. MLAs in oil-rich Alberta should go on a fact-finding mission to North Dakota to learn more!

Democracy and governing

In Iowa, voters approved a ballot measure that put the lieutenant-governor in charge if the governor dies or resigns. In Indiana, a ballot measure removed the superintendent of public instruction from the gubernatorial line of succession.

The Oregon constitution was amended to allow the legislature to impeach the governor and top cabinet positions with a two-thirds majority vote in both houses. Previously, Oregon was the only U.S. state where the legislature didn't have the authority to impeach the governor.

Wisconsin joined 27 other states to prohibit private donations of cash or equipment to administer elections. Kyle Koenen of the Wisconsin Institute for Liberty & Law noted that, "The concerns that have been expressed regarding Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's extensive funding of election administration in Democratic-leaning communities closely parallel the worries that would emerge if a donor with right-leaning inclinations were to direct their resources exclusively toward Republican-leaning areas."

By a vote of 61% to 39%, North Dakota voters banned candidates 81 years old or older from running for the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives. The candidate's age would be printed on the ballot if this new rule is deemed discriminatory by the courts.

Citizens' Initiative in Canada

Only two provinces, British Columbia and Alberta, have citizens' initiative laws.

British Columbia held a referendum in 1991 on whether to allow citizens to initiate referendums. Despite 83% voting in favour, the legislation wasn't introduced until 1996.

In B.C., any voter can launch a petition campaign. To be successful, the petition must be signed by at least 10% of the registered voters in every electoral district within 90 days. If that threshold is met, the Legislature can either introduce the legislation or send it to an initiative vote. To win the vote, more than 50% of the ballots must be cast in favour, in at least two-thirds of the electoral districts.

In Alberta, any voter can launch a petition campaign. For a legislative or policy proposal, the petition must be signed by at least 10% of the total number of electors from the last election within 120 days. Similarly, if the threshold is met, the Legislature can either introduce legislation or send it to an initiative vote. Alberta introduced its law in 2022, but made it easier to obtain the required signatures in 2025.

You don't see this every day

Voters in Maine rejected changing the state flag from a sailor and farmer flanking a pine tree to a simplified design featuring a pine tree and star on a tan flag. Despite this tan flag being the state flag back in 1909, Republican State Representative Shelley Rudnicki said, "If you look at the countries that use the star in the corner, it's a lot of communist stuff that we don't want to be associated with."

Current Maine flag:

Proposed new flag:

Replacing the flag lost 56% to 44%.

Missouri voters approved legalizing and regulating sports gambling but rejected the approval of allowing the gaming commission to issue one more gambling boat license on the Missouri River.

California voters rejected Proposition 6, which would have removed involuntary servitude as punishment for a crime. Had this passed, the Department of Corrections would have to award credits or payments to criminals who voluntarily participate in prison jobs.

Voters in Colorado rejected a ballot measure that would have prohibited trophy hunting of mountain lions, bobcats and lynxes. Similarly, voters approved a state constitutional right to hunt and fish in Florida.

Just across the border from Vancouver, Washington state voters narrowly approved a ballot initiative prohibiting state and local government from restricting access to natural gas. Hopefully, some of their good sense will rub off in British Columbia.

The original democracy was direct democracy

The word "democracy" comes from two Greek words that mean people (demos) and rule/power (kratos).

Athenian democracy was formed around 507 B.C. Each year, 500 citizens were selected to serve. Those selected would be akin today to a hybrid of senior civil servants and elected representatives. Their job was to supervise government workers and put forward laws to the assembly, where citizens of Athens had the final say.

However, citizenship was limited. Only men who were born in Athens were considered citizens. Women, foreigners and slaves were not considered citizens. Athens' estimated 260,000 residents included only 40,000 male citizens with voting rights.

If you want to learn more about U.S. ballot initiatives, visit Ballotpedia.org. This non-partisan, charitable organization tracks ballot measures each election.

Queen Elizabeth II signs Canada's constitutional proclamation as Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau looks on, in Ottawa, April 17, 1982.

SOURCE: THE CANADIAN PRESS/RON POLING

WHY CANADA'S *CHARTER* IGNORES PROPERTY RIGHTS AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR YOUR STUFF

Peter Shawn Taylor

Why do governments exist? There must be a more convincing reason than simply providing well-paid jobs for folks who enjoy bossing others around.

According to 17th century English philosopher John Locke, a state's raison d'etre comes down to one thing: protecting your stuff. "The great and chief end therefore, of Mens ... putting themselves under Government, is the Preservation of their Property," Locke wrote in 1690. And by this most basic measure of competence, Canadian governments are failing miserably.

Nowhere is the failure more obvious than in Richmond, B.C., where the recent court case of Cowichan v. Canada has upended the foundational concept of property rights. According to B.C. Supreme Court judge Barbara Young, a surveying error in 1859 means a plot of nearly 800 acres along the Fraser River in what is now Richmond belongs to the Cowichan tribe and should never have been declared Crown land, nor subsequently sold to private citizens. As a result, Young ruled this land is still subject to aboriginal title, despite the fact others have owned it for centuries. Now local homeowners are panicking after being told they cannot sell or renovate their homes without the permission of Cowichan tribal leaders. In late 2025, a Wall Street Journal headline asked, "Do Property Rights Still Exist in British Columbia?" No one has yet provided a convincing answer.

In truth, however, Canadian governments were doing a lousy job at fulfilling Locke's prime directive long before the Cowichan ruling. The court case is merely the latest and most glaring example of the steady diminution of Canadian property rights over recent decades. As governments increasingly embrace communitarian or social-democratic principles, the ability of individuals to control what happens to their land and possessions is being steadily eroded.

Where does the blame for this ongoing catastrophe lie? A good place to start is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that alleged protector of all our fundamental rights.

Scan the constitutions of the world's liberal democracies and you will generally find a list of specific freedoms guaranteed to all citizens, including freedom of speech, religious belief and association and assembly, as well as the right to own property and protection against its unlawful seizure.

In Canada, however, the Charter is completely silent on property rights. "It certainly makes us an outlier," says University of Saskatchewan constitutional lawyer Dwight Newman. Among the 38 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations, only Canada and New Zealand lack explicit constitutional protection for property rights. Even the constitutions of unrepentant communist countries such as China and North Korea pay lip service to property rights.

Canada's omission is a relatively recent development. In 1960, then-prime minister John Diefenbaker's Canadian Bill of Rights enshrined in Canadian legislation the "right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law." Such terminology is similar to what you will find in most other Western liberal countries' constitutions. When the Charter appeared in 1982, this protection was nowhere to be seen.

As Newman recounts, during the early 1980s when the Charter was being debated, property rights were not a top-of-mind issue. "The political focus of the day was on equality rather than liberty," he says. Plus, several premiers were concerned that a constitutional safeguard for property rights would erode their ability to enact specific statist policies, such as limiting land purchases by non-islanders in Prince Edward Island and nationalizing the resource sector in Saskatchewan.

While then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau generally accepted a need for property rights, this wasn't a hill he was prepared to die on. And, in the face of provincial opposition, he tossed them overboard to ensure the rest of his Charter passed muster.

At the same time, however, a series of minor mishaps and coincidences played an equally important role. Saskatchewan's then-premier Allan Blakeney, for example, was apparently wavering in his objection to property rights as negotiations reached their climax. But, during a crucial weekend in mid-January 1981, he was holidaying in Hawaii and difficult to reach. Trudeau had promised to phone him to discuss property rights, but his car got a flat tire and he never made contact. According to Newman's sources, Blakeney's view hardened after that missed call.

Another curiosity is that Section 33 of the Charter, aka the Notwithstanding Clause, would have assuaged the premiers' worries about property rights by providing an escape hatch for contentious provincial policies. Unfortunately, Section 33 wasn't conceived until November 1981 – after property rights had already been removed. "Had the premiers been able to look at the whole final text, then property rights might have seemed less worrisome," adds Newman.

Regardless of the underlying reason – political fashion, provincial objections or random happenstance – Canadians today suffer for their lack of property rights protection.

"Property is one of the basic ideas of Western liberal democracy. It is also fundamental to our economic system," says Bruce Pardy, executive director of the think tank Rights Probe. Without explicit constitutional limits, he warns, Canadian governments "can take your land and give you nothing, if that's what they decide they want to do." And that's exactly what many governments do.

Most provinces have given themselves the power to seize private property through civil forfeitures and keep the proceeds under the guise of fighting crime. Because forfeiture orders are based on civil rather than criminal law, there's no requirement that an individual be found definitively guilty of anything. The mere fact a piece of property was tangentially involved in some criminal act is often sufficient.

But, even this underplays the full scope of a government's ability to take away a Canadian citizen's legally-held property. This awesome power wasn't fully revealed until the 2022 Freedom Convoy protests. Once former prime minister Justin Trudeau invoked the Emergencies Act, his government immediately set about freezing protestors' bank accounts, leaving them without access to their own finances and, thus, unable to pay bills or buy food. Only later were these actions declared unlawful. Even after the protest was over, the government pursued participants' property with an unseemly zeal — attempts to seize organizer Chris Barber's prized truck "Big Red" is a notorious example of this.

A similarly authoritarian attitude pervades a variety of other government policies, most notably in housing. Rather than allowing the market to function through the normal interaction of supply and demand, governments at all levels actively seek to block the rights of property owners. Rent control prevents the charging of market rates. "Renoviction" bylaws create obstacles for owners who want to renovate apartments they

own, subordinating their rights to those of their tenants. Inclusionary zoning rules force property owners to build below-market apartments against their wishes. Vacant home taxes punish anyone who wants to own more than one house. Housing policy in Canada today consists mainly of governments inventing new ways to take away the rights of property owners.

The 2025 federal budget offers further evidence of the disdain Ottawa holds for property rights. A proposal for a high-speed rail line through Ontario and Quebec exempts the plan from the federal Expropriation Act. This means any land needed for this boondoggle-in-the-making can be seized without the need for a market value offer. It also blocks private owners from doing any work on their land for up to four years if the state expresses an interest in it.

Another even more obscure section of the 2025 Budget amends Canada's copyright law so that artists are entitled to a portion of all future resales of their work. Even after selling their paintings or sculptures to an arm's-length buyer, the artist effectively retains a permanent ownership share. It will thus become impossible for anyone to ever fully own a work of art.

"If you can't do with your own property whatever you want, if it needs to be regulated and inspected and approved and controlled and taxed by government, then we are just pretending we have a full range of property rights," gripes Pardy.

Given the situation in Canada today, it's worth asking how life would be different if the Charter did have a property rights clause. What if Pierre Trudeau's car hadn't got a flat in January 1981? Or, if the Notwithstanding Clause had been written a few months earlier? Experience from other countries with constitutional affirmation of property rights offers a glimpse down the path not taken.

The U.S. Constitution's Fifth Amendment offers explicit protection against the unjust seizure of private property by government. But, even that is not an iron clad defense, as Eric Claeys, law professor at George Mason University, points out in his 2025 book "Natural Property Rights."

Claeys' book begins with a look at the infamous 2005 U.S. Supreme Court case of Kelo v. City of New London in which civic officials were allowed to expropriate private homes in order to give their land to a developer planning to build a pharmaceutical plant. There was no evidence such a move was in the broader public interest. The court simply accepted that helping out the developer in this way could boost the local economy. As Kelo's many critics have pointed out, such a flaccid standard can be used to justify almost any government taking – essentially rendering the Fifth Amendment meaningless.

"Kelo shocked a lot of people," Claeys says in an interview, "and that made them more vigilant." While the seizure was approved, the larger result was a huge public outcry that saw many key municipal and state legislators involved in the expropriation voted out of office. Across the country, more than a dozen states amended their constitutions to forbid Kelo-type seizures and almost every state tightened its rules covering eminent domain.

The full lesson of Kelo, Claeys says, is that the most reliable defense of property owners' rights is not a particular constitutional clause, but the presence of an alert and active electorate. Given the judiciary's scope in interpreting the law, "a constitutional guarantee only works if it is an expression of a broad consensus among elites and rank-and-file voters," he says.

Ireland offers a somewhat different perspective. Born out of that country's struggle to free itself from the United Kingdom, its 1937 Constitution includes both an individual right to own property and institutional protection for the broader concept of private ownership. "Ireland is quite obsessed with our land," explains Sarah Hamill, a law professor at Trinity College Dublin.

This obsession proved central to two landmark court cases in the 1980s that have come to define the issue of property rights in Ireland. As Hamill explains, the Irish courts have generally accepted the notion that landlords are entitled to earn market rents. Because of this, any attempt at permanently freezing or controlling rents is likely to be ruled unconstitutional. "Politicians will often use the Constitution as an excuse to avoid doing more" when it comes to the demands of tenant groups, she observes in an interview. In fact, many progressive activists have since taken to demanding that the Irish Constitution be amended to include a new tenants' "right" to housing to counterbalance the existing safeguards for landlords.

While Kelo reveals that the mere mention of property in a constitution is not sufficient to protect citizens from unjust seizures, the Irish experience suggests a strongly worded property rights clause can have a salutary effect, if the courts are prepared to defend the concept. The same effect would presumably hold in Canada.

Bolstering the case for a Canadian property rights clause is the observation from law professor Newman that the courts tend to read the Charter as a complete body of work. "There is no question a Charter of Rights with property rights protection and one without property rights would be very different things," he observes. The presence of an economic right to owning property – making it equivalent to other fundamental rights such as freedom of speech or religion – would likely cause judges to see the Charter in a whole new way. At the very least, Newman notes, the presence of such a clause would force governments to go to greater lengths to justify policies that involve obvious interference with private property in areas such as housing because it would provide citizens with a legal bulwark against such moves.

Despite several attempts at inserting property rights into the Charter since 1982, however, Canada's constitutional amending process has so far proven too unwieldy. Newman suggests a backdoor method using Section 43 of the Charter, which allows for constitutional amendments in one province at a time, although the legality of such a manoeuvre is uncertain. Even more problematic, in the face of repeated threats and unjust government takings, most Canadians show little interest in defending their own property rights. "Is there anything more Canadian that acquiescence?" asks law professor Pardy glumly.

As an example of this lethargy, Pardy notes that both B.C. and Ottawa have enshrined the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) into provincial and federal legislation. These moves have bolstered the legal notion of eternal aboriginal title and figure prominently in the recent Cowichan ruling. Given that UNDRIP legislation is popular with many voters, who seem to consider it a necessary step in reconciliation, the recent damage done to property rights in Canada can be regarded as a self-inflicted wound.

If Canadians really want to protect their right to own and keep property, they're going to have to start pushing back. And Cowichan offers the opportunity for such a change in attitude. Claeys suggests the case could prove to be "an inflection point" for Canada, in the same way that Kelo pushed Americans to become far more active in defending their own property rights.

At the leading edge of this inflection point is the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. The CTF has retained legal counsel with plans to become an intervenor in the pending appeal of the Cowichan decision, arguing on behalf of Canadian property owners. It is also organizing a nation-wide petition calling for a Charter amendment to explicitly recognize property rights in the Constitution. The issue is also starting to get political traction. Now is the time to make some noise.

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GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA / FLICKR

Introduction of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) in the BC Legislature on October 24, 2019.

2025 Teddy Waste Awards: THE BEST OF THE WORST OF GOVERNMENT WASTE

Franco Terrazzano
CTF Federal Director

You hate it when politicians and bureaucrats burn through your tax dollars like pyromaniacs at a bonfire.

But, it's a lot of fun mocking them for it.

Politicians and bureaucrats hate being mocked. They think they're so important and expect to be obeyed and viewed with reverence. They get outraged when you have the audacity to laugh at their dumb decisions.

That's why, every year, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation mocks them with the Teddy Waste Awards show. We hand out big, golden pig trophies to politicians and bureaucrats who went above and beyond in wasting your money.

We hand out Waste Awards to the best of the worst in government waste at municipal, provincial and federal governments. And, this year, we had a very special Lifetime Achievement Waste Award to hand out...

LIFETIME ACHEIVEMENT

The GOAT of government waste: Justin Trudeau

Former Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau was bad at a lot of things, but he might be the best ever at wasting tax dollars.

After all, Trudeau doubled the debt in less than a decade.

He added 99,000 extra federal paper pushers and ballooned the cost of the bureaucracy by more than 70%.

And Trudeau never met a problem he didn't try to fix by wasting your money.

As inflation reached a 40-year high, Trudeau took his cabinet ministers on three "affordability retreats" in a single year. Those retreats cost taxpayers more than $1 million.

Trudeau was the Supreme Leader of spending your money overseas.

He spent $61,000 on Manhattan hotel rooms during a two-day, star-studded conference in New York. What was the conference about? Fighting poverty...

Trudeau was fighting poverty the only way he knew how, with selfies and room service.

Trudeau also spent $220,000 on airplane food during a six-day trip to the Indo-Pacific region and billed you for a $6,000 per night hotel suite during the Queen's funeral in London, England.

Because he doubled the debt. Because he ballooned the bureaucracy.

And because he was the Wayne Gretzky of Waste, Justin Trudeau is a VERY worthy recipient of this year's Lifetime Achievement Award for Waste.

FEDERAL WINNER

Time for Global Affairs Canada to go to rehab

There was a lot of stiff competition for the federal Waste Award this year, but Global Affairs Canada came away with the golden hardware.

Bureaucrats at Global Affairs are spending $51,000 a month on booze and sticking you with the tab.

At times, the records obtained by the CTF indicate the alcohol was purchased for a specific purpose, such as an official event or reception or, in one case, a $1,024 booze-filled "trivia night."

And remember, Global Affairs is the same department that spent $8,800 on a sex toy show in Germany, $12,000 so seniors in other countries could talk about their sex lives in front of live audiences and $1,700 on a musical about lesbian pirates.

How did all that spending get approved?

We think it must be the $51,000 per month the department is spending on booze.

Nominee: Department of National Defence

The Department of National Defence spent $34 million on sleeping bags that don't work. What was the issue with the sleeping bags that military intelligence didn't see coming?

The sleeping bags weren't warm and it turns out Canada has a little thing called winter.

Here's a taxpayer pro tip for National Defence — there's a not-so-classified source you could buy warm sleeping bags from: Canadian Tire.

Nominee: Parks Canada

Parks Canada decided to remove the American Bullfrog from British Columbia's Gulf Islands National Park.

How hard can it be to find an American frog? It's going to be the loudest one in the pond...

Well, it took Parks Canada four years, and $10,000, to capture a single frog.

You send your kids to the pond and they come back with four frogs, four minutes later. But you give Parks Canada $10,000 and it takes them four years to catch just one frog.

Nominee: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council is spending tens of thousands of dollars on niche research projects.

It spent $20,000 studying gender politics in Peruvian rock music and $105,000 studying the "birth, life and death" of a grocery cart.

The SSHRC also spent $7,777 researching "sexual and gender identities in online Harry Potter fan communities."

What a waste of money! We all know J.K. Rowling is pretty firm on her stance on gender.

Nominee: Statistics Canada

Move over Joe Rogan, there's a new podcaster in town: The government of Canada.

Statistics Canada spent almost $1 million making a podcast, but it's not about statistics. Those bureaucrats made podcasts about climate change, arts and crafts, misinformation and gender identity.

The podcast only has 229 subscribers. That means they can't even get 97% of their own employees to listen to their own podcast.

PROVINCIAL WINNER

New Brunswick tourism bureaucrats don't know anything about New Brunswick

You'd think the government of New Brunswick knows a thing or two about its province.

You'd think it at least knows the big details like its capital city, its biggest city and its notable attractions.

Unfortunately, you'd be wrong.

New Brunswick's tourism minister and other bureaucrats spent thousands of dollars visiting Europe to promote the province as a destination for European tourists.

Much of the trip was supposed to be spent informing tour companies of the province's attractions.

But, the resulting ads were full of incorrect information.

One ad told visitors to "spend time in Saint John, the provincial capital."

Saint John is not the capital, Fredericton is.

The ads suggested visiting the Martello Tower, the New Brunswick Museum and the Cherry Brook Zoo.

That all sounds fun, but there's one big problem: Those attractions have been closed for years.

You know what their tourism ad should have been:

"Come to New Brunswick, we don't know where anything is and everything is closed."

Nominee: Quebec Premier François Legault

Legault spent $345 on a signed Guy Lafleur jersey for his office. Not content with a taxpayer-funded jersey, Legault spent another $937 on the frame to hang up his taxpayer-funded jersey.

Forget elbows up, that should be a five-minute major for high spending.

Nominee: Manitoba Health

Manitoba Health ruffled some feathers with a breast cancer awareness campaign.

The campaign urged Manitobans to "be an early bird: check your tits, your boobies, your hooters."

After spending $2,000, the government took down the ads following public backlash that the ads were offensive and the government was taking the issue too lightly.

Nominee: BC Rail

Government executives at BC Rail are raking in $500,000 a year. They also get a $12,000 transportation allowance.

There's one big problem...

BC Rail has no trains.

It sold its train and railway decades ago. But it kept those bureaucrats around and kept paying them.

The only thing BC Rail is moving is money from taxpayers' wallets to bureaucrats' bank accounts.

Nominee: Ontario's Windsor Regional Hospital

A government-owned-and-operated Tim Hortons at the Windsor hospital has been losing taxpayer money for years.

In 2023-24, the hospital lost $487,662, which is equivalent to funding three additional heart transplants a year.

The Tim Hortons restaurant has cost the hospital more than $2 million since hospital administrators first went into the donut business, starting around 2010.

This begs the question: How do you lose money selling coffee and donuts?

Is the premier taking the Timbits?

Nominee: Alberta Foundation for the Arts

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts has a long history of spending money on "art" that few Canadians would ever willingly buy or pay to see.

It spent taxpayers' money so an artist could flop around on a futon for a couple minutes and showcase a painting that can best be described as "ants on a pop tart."

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts gave an artist $15,000 and she produced a video where she seemed to be playing peek-a-boo from behind big sheets of paper taped to the wall.

For the third year, the CTF hosted the Teddy Awards with a live audience in Calgary. Host Franco Terrazzano and Porky the Waste Hater entertained the crowd with ridiculous, but true, stories of government waste.

MUNICIPAL WINNER

The Bow River's phone bill is out of control

The city of Calgary spent $65,000 on an art project so people can have a fake phone call with the Bow River.

Yes, you read that right.

The city spent tens of thousands of dollars so you could dial a phone number to hear different recordings of the river.

The documents the CTF obtained show Calgary bureaucrats expressing concern the project "may not be received well, perceived as a waste of money or simply foolish."

No kidding...

Well, there is one silver lining: It's now officially easier to get a hold of a Calgary river than the Canada Revenue Agency.

Nominee: Ottawa

Ottawa is not exactly known for its nightlife. To be fair, it's hard to have a vibrant downtown when all the government bureaucrats stop working from their couch at 2 pm.

The city's solution to make Ottawa's nightlife more vibrant? Hire another bureaucrat!

The city hired a nightlife commissioner, or "night mayor," to improve the city's nightlife. The night mayor's budget is $160,000.

Thanks to taxpayer money, Ottawa is now the first city that gets nothing done 24-7.

Nominee: Saskatoon

The city of Saskatoon paid consultants $317,757 to come up with the name and brand "LINK" for its bus system, according to documents obtained by the CTF.

The project took almost three years to complete and 27 "engagement sessions" were held to determine the name. The cost included $25,000 directly for the name itself and $40,000 for brand "look and feel."

After all this time and money spent, the new logo looks almost identical to the previous one.

Nominee: Montreal Transit

Managers at Montreal Transport are riding around in taxpayer-funded electric Ford Mustangs.

The $1.2 million purchase was defended on the grounds that the government has a buy electric mandate and that the electric muscle cars were a better fit for managers, some of whom are "larger" and "taller."

The Mustangs were bought when Montreal Transit was forced to cut hundreds of jobs.

It turns out that Montreal Transit isn't too big to fail, their bus managers are just too big to fit into a Toyota Corolla.

Nominee: Metro Vancouver

Politicians from Metro Vancouver have been taking a lot of flak for wasting taxpayer money. So, they held a meeting to look for savings.

The meeting cost taxpayers $20,000. They didn't find a single dollar of savings.

Yup, $20,000 meeting, zero savings.

Where could Vancouver politicians save money?

Don't spend $64,000 on a wine and cheese event 4,375 kilometres to the east in Toronto.

Don't spend $17,000 on food and drinks at a summer fair.

And this might be the most important takeaway for Vancouver politicians: some meetings are just meant to be emails.

Q&A WITH BLAINE HIGGS

The Honourable Blaine Higgs is the former premier of New Brunswick. Prior to entering politics, Higgs worked in the energy sector with Irving Oil for more than three decades. He was elected as a New Brunswick Progressive Conservative Member of the Legislative Assembly in 2010 and served as finance minister in the David Alward government until 2014. He won the PC Party leadership in 2016 and served as leader of the official opposition until 2018, when he became New Brunswick's 34th premier.

As premier, his government balanced the budget every year – including during COVID 19 – cut taxes and continued the reform of the government employee pensions that was started when he was finance minister. His party won a majority government in 2020 and was defeated in the 2024 election.

Canadian Taxpayers Federation President Scott Hennig caught up with Premier Higgs to discuss how he managed one of the most fiscally responsible governments in the country.

CTF President Scott Hennig (left) interviewing former New Brunswick premier Blaine Higgs

This interview has been edited for length and clarity. To watch the full interview, visit the CTF's YouTube page: youtube.com/taxpayerDOTcom

Scott Hennig: You grew up in Forest City. What was it like growing up in rural New Brunswick?

Blaine Higgs: Forest City is a small international community located in the southwestern area of New Brunswick, bordering on the state of Maine. Even though my dad was a customs officer, the rules of crossing the border were much more relaxed than today. I had close friends on both sides of the border.

As a teenager, I experienced directly the pride that Americans from all backgrounds have for their country. In Canada, we have always focused on our differences with very diverse cultures, often with many competing interests and priorities. In recent years, driven by the Trump effect, we have seen our national pride growing. This may prove to be the defining moment to rethink the importance of Canada's unity of purpose and the collective good.

SH: Before politics, you worked at Irving Oil for more than three decades. You're a mechanical engineer. What was that experience like working in the energy industry in Atlantic Canada?

BH: It was demanding and rewarding. I enjoyed the responsibility and the independence given to me as I managed various operating divisions within the company. Unlike government, spending money in business without identified results is a problem, not an achievement. Constantly improving customer service was always a key priority.

By the time I retired in 2010, I used to joke that I should have had a bumper sticker that said, "I survived Irving," and proud of it. That's why I questioned why results weren't a central theme in government.

SH: Not enough business people or not enough engineers?

BH: Probably both. As an engineer, I focused on facts and evidence. The abstract nature of decision-making in government was frustrating. Business teaches accountability.

When I became finance minister, I remember my first meeting with the deputy minister. I kept asking questions until he finally closed his binder and said, "You don't need to know this. We'll give you enough information to speak intelligently in front of a camera." I said, "Really? I spent 30 years needing to understand exactly what my job was and how we could do it better. This is going to be a problem." He told me I'd get used to it, but I didn't and he retired shortly after that. People confuse detailed questions with micromanagement. I dig in until I know something is being properly managed. In many government departments, real management can be a foreign concept.

SH: We're going to get into more of that, but I want to know if politics was a passion for your family or something that you came to late?

BH: No, it was not a passion in my family. My father worked on a road crew, when I was very young, and I remember elections when he did not know if he would have a job the next day. He watched the news anxiously because when a new government came in, the old government's people were laid off.

SH: Even road crews?

BH: Even road crews, so that changed, obviously for good reason. But neither of my parents were active in the political realm.

SH: You looked a little bit at the Confederation of Regions Party as well as the Liberal Party, and then you settled on the PCs. Why the PCs?

BH: When I looked at the Liberals, I saw a philosophy focused on getting elected and staying elected. At that time, there was a clearer distinction between political left and right. But, over time, there was less focus on a long-term vision for the province.

The Confederation of Regions Party initially appealed to me because it was about defining problems and making better decisions. Unfortunately, it became viewed as a language-issue party but, for me, it was about

making sense of how two working languages could function together and how we could become a truly bilingual province. I was 35 and ran unsuccessfully for leader, but I never ran for that party in the provincial election.

SH: In 2010 you decided to run. What pushed you over the edge?

BH: I was in the transportation sector of Irving Oil. I was responsible for the safe and efficient operation of the terminals and fuel distribution in Eastern Canada, New England and internationally. I wanted to retire from Irving and do something completely different. I ran for nomination for the PC party in the riding of Quispamsis. I won the nomination easily as it was uncontested. Nobody expected, however, that I would win the riding that year in the provincial election.

SH: So, it was a Liberal-held riding?

BH: Yes. The minister of health held it and she was very popular. But, it was one of those elections where it didn't matter. It was an NB Power election. The Liberal government of the day had plans to sell NB Power to Hydro-Québec and that didn't go down well. There was a general groundswell against the Liberal government. I got elected because the government was being thrown out.

SH: You became finance minister and one of the major things you undertook was pension reform, something we have not seen much of across the country. What motivated you to take that on, what changed, and what has happened since?

BH: Premier David Alward was very focused on pension reform. The issue was brought to us by the nurses' association because their pension was in real trouble. Other unions were not worried, even though their plans were also in trouble, because their contracts said the government would make up any shortfalls. So, benefits kept increasing, people were retiring earlier and taxpayers were covering the gaps of hundreds of million dollars each year. The nurses did not have that guarantee. Their plan was only about 65% funded and crashing.

SH: Oh, boy.

BH: They could not fund retirements, and a big wave of retirements was coming within ten years. The solution was a shared-risk model, similar to models used in Europe. We had to inject several hundred million dollars to bring the funding levels to about 120% initially. After that, contributions between employees and government would be equal and the plan jointly managed. We made it clear this model would apply across government, including MLAs. About 65% of people in the province had no defined-benefit pension, yet those taxpayers were contributing roughly $4 for every $1 from government employees. These plans were designed in the 1960s, when people worked for 30 or 40 years and then retired for maybe 15 years.

The actuaries were clear that the plans were unsustainable. We went through a lot of challenges, but we converted 85% of plans, including MLAs, teachers and most public-sector unions.

There were holdouts. In 2023, we finished the job for the remaining unions. The Canadian Union of Public Employees refused to negotiate, even though the shared-risk model had proven itself. It went through the COVID-19 years and paid out more, or at least as much as it would have under the old system. The plan is designed to protect the principal when interest rates are low and it worked. We ultimately had to pass legislation to include the last two unions.

In 2014, Liberal leader Brian Gallant promised to cancel the reforms. After he was elected, he didn't, because he saw they made sense. Unfortunately, the current premier cancelled the reforms for the remaining 15% of employees in 2024, without ever really understanding the value for both employee and the taxpayers.

SH: When the Alward government was defeated in 2014 and the Gallant Liberals came in, did you consider leaving politics, or did you always plan to stick it out in opposition?

BH: Well, it was a huge disappointment because of all the things we were doing in finance. I was working horrendous hours, but I was used to that from Irving.

SH: I'm sure your staff loved that.

BH: They questioned it occasionally, but I would tell them, "We are running this like a business." People would say, "Government is not a business," and I would disagree, because taxpayers deserve maximum value for every dollar. If you are not getting results, you are wasting taxpayers' money.

In my first budget in 2010, I took it home and rewrote it over a weekend. I sent it to the department on Monday and told them we would review it Tuesday. When I came in, nothing had changed. That isn't what I wanted, but I learned as finance minister, "you can't always get what you want."

In business, the company needs to be profitable, thus ensuring continuous employment and support for your family. However, in government you work for the people to provide better education, healthcare, roads and social programs to deliver the best service possible. It was far more compelling than anything I had done in business, which made me wonder why don't we have better accountability? Why doesn't everyone in government feel they have an obligation be part of the solution? When I entered government, I initially wondered how the civil service had allowed things to get so bad. Within a few months, I realized the problem was not the civil service. It was this tremendous volatility of purpose coming from one government to the next, with no continuity and no real goal to run the province better, just a goal to stay elected.

In New Brunswick's 49 ridings, everyone tries to get elected by promising something local. When

THE CANADIAN PRESS/JAMES WEST

Blaine Higgs speaks at his official nomination in Quispamsis, N.B., on August 27, 2018.

I first ran for office in 2010, I campaigned on a provincial platform to build the foundation for a better province. The only thing I promised locally was a $50,000 skateboard park. Nothing else. I even ran against a $30-million project to build a six-lane highway from Quispamsis to Saint John.

Unfortunately, in 2014, we lost government. I felt terrible because we had built a great finance team. Cleaning out my office was emotional. In some ways, it was even more emotional than the 2024 loss.

SH: Really?

BH: My goal as finance minister and, later, as premier was always to work with the civil service and dedicated colleagues to get real and measurable results, much more than political statements. Throughout my political career, I was fortunate to have worked with some of the most dedicated individuals I had ever worked with in my entire career. The 2014 election was the first time I experienced that kind of loss in the workplace and as the song goes, "The First Cut is the Deepest."

SH: The thing about being a politician is that it's the highest of highs and lowest of lows.

BH: It is. If I was stopping at Canadian Tire when I was finance minister or premier, I'd say to my wife, "Could you run in and get this? Because I'll never get out." But, once you lose an election, you can walk in and pass 10 people and they don't even know you exist. It changes abruptly.

SH: In 2016, you decided to run for the leadership of the PC Party. What made you put your name forward?

BH: It was not an easy decision. I had people calling me asking whether I would run. And then, I thought, "Well, there are things I would have liked to have done as finance minister."

The reality is the province can be fixed. And I knew that. I ran on the slogan "province first, politics second." That didn't sit well with a lot of my colleagues, especially those party stalwarts that only wanted to maintain their control of the party and believed the very opposite slogan was much more appropriate. After all, I was considered an outsider. I only had two colleagues who sacrificially supported me during my leadership campaign.

I, and a dedicated team worked very hard. For two years, I travelled throughout the province. I focused on bringing new people into the party to change the political approach, which I believed was possible.

When I spoke to people, I'd say, "Give me a day and your support at the nomination convention and I'm going to give your province back." A province that would no longer be heading over the financial cliff and would be seen positively throughout the country.

SH: The 2018 election left five weeks of uncertainty about who would form government. The Liberals tried to govern in a minority that fell apart, and you took over. How challenging was it to govern with a minority and rely on another party's support?

BH: There's an old saying that a good crisis focuses the mind. I joked that there were scratch marks on the desk when I arrived because the former premier was hanging on. I said there would be no scratch marks when I was done.

In our first year, 2018–19, we faced one of the worst floods in provincial history. The second year, COVID hit.

During COVID, we did something unusual for Canada. We created a COVID cabinet committee and brought the leaders of the other three parties into cabinet. They saw the same presentations I saw from the public health officers.

We listened to the recommendations, decided together what to do, and that was it. The benefit was that we focused on the crisis instead of spending the afternoons chirping at each other.

You start to think – why couldn't we use that model on a larger scale, on big issues like health, education, social assistance or capital spending? Pick three or four major items and agree on a formula that makes sense for the big picture. It's easier said than done, but COVID showed it was possible.

SH: It is fascinating to compare your time as finance minister in the New Brunswick government, when there were deficit budgets, with your time as premier, when you had balanced budgets, paid down debt and cut taxes. How do you explain that difference between one PC government that could not balance the budget and another that did so consistently?

BH: Basically, there has to be a will within the premier's office to get it done.

If you look at the 2010 election, we were getting elected because the Liberal government was being thrown out over the NB Power pending sale. Even with that issue, we promised everything to everybody. Once elected, we had to try and pay for it.

One of the tricks of the trade for a newly elected government is to dump as many expenditures as possible into the current year's budget. In other words, you're coming into the last six months of the previous government's budget – they own it – and you add as much as you can to make it look worse. That way, it takes pressure off your next four budgets.

After a few years, we were bringing deficits down, but then it was time for another election.

So, what's the plan? Promise more to get elected. We didn't promise as much in 2014, it was more contained.

Premier Gallant, however promised $1.6 billion in new spending in the 2018 election.

When I read an article saying, "The first balanced budget of the Higgs government was put together by the Gallant government," it is more than misleading. Had Premier Gallant been re-elected in 2018, he would never have balanced the budget because of his election promises. We didn't promise any of that.

I made the announcement in the state of the province that it would be balanced the first time around. The only reason we could do that was because we didn't have a raft of new promises from the fall election process.

SH: Your government cut income taxes, cut property taxes and balanced the budget. Which achievement are you most proud of?

BH: Balancing the budget is foundational for the security of future generations and ensures funding is available for critical expenditures. I've always argued there's plenty of money in the system, it's just spent poorly. We reduced taxes and balanced the budget. We spent more than any previous government on services because we could, but we didn't spend it all. We reduced the debt substantially and redirected more than $100 million per year from interest payments to government services. What I am most proud of, however, was having national media recognize that New Brunswick was an example of what is possible. This carried on through the COVID years and the pride and enthusiasm for our province was building.

Late in my first term as finance minister, we recognized there would be a big wave of nurse retirements within 10 years, and we weren't graduating enough nurses to meet that need. We committed $8 million per year of additional funding to each of the University of Moncton and the University of New Brunswick to double the number of education seats for nurses. We lost government in 2014 and four years later when we returned, we learned that enrolment had actually gone down between 2014 and 2018. The additional $64 million had been spent without any results, so we decided to cancel the extra funding.

The universities responded, "Oh no, we'll fill the seats." And after 2018, enrolment started to grow and double.

SH: What is even more remarkable than balancing the budget every year is that you balanced it during COVID. I do not think any other government in Canada did that. How did you manage it?

BH: We spent every dime the federal government provided for COVID and hundreds of millions of provincial dollars as well, but we analyzed where the money was going.

Many people looked at it as a chance to spend money because the public would accept it.

I remember a meeting with a company in the food industry. They said, "Because you shut things down, we will not have room in our potato houses to accommodate the growers produce next year. You need to buy these excess potatoes from us."

I asked what they thought I would do with all these potatoes.

They said, "Well, you could give them to somebody."

And I said, "Well, you can give them to somebody. You're not going out of business anytime soon and you're going to need these growers."

Several weeks later, I ran into the same individual. I asked how he made out with his potato situation?

He said, "You wouldn't believe it. The fast-food chains are going wild. We're selling everything we can make. In fact, we're going to run out of potatoes soon."

I replied, "I really messed up, didn't I?"

He said, "Why? You didn't buy any potatoes."

And I said, "But had I bought them, I could sell them back to you at a premium!"

SH: You were an established business leader before politics. Did your 30-plus year business career give you an edge when negotiating with unions, business leaders and other politicians?

BH: Without a doubt, because I had no problem saying no. I also had no problem getting up and leaving a meeting if there was no progress being made. Anybody can get an agreement, but it may not be worth the paper it's written on, and it can expose the province significantly. People can say, "Well, they negotiated a deal." I'm not saying every deal we did was great but, at the end of the day, you have to win more than you lose or, at least, break even as it is all taxpayers who pay for the loss.

You don't find many people from business backgrounds joining politics, likely because of the frustration that goes with it. Whether you get something done or not, there's always the risk it will be undone by the next government.

I've often wondered why any business would support a Liberal, NDP or Green government and not be wholeheartedly conservative, because that's the best chance they have of government operating the way they would have to operate in business.

SH: Looking at New Brunswick's traditional challenges – geography, demographics, reliance on transfers – do you see a day when it can be a "have" province? And, is energy development key to that?

BH: I did. And yes, energy development is key to that. I took that position early on. I wasn't proud to be a recipient of transfer payments. I'm proud to be part of a country that believes in national standards and that, if you're a Canadian, you should

THE CANADIAN PRESS/ANDREW VAUGHAN

Premier-elect Blaine Higgs embraces his wife Marcia as he addresses supporters at his campaign headquarters in Quispamsis, N.B. on September 24, 2018.

have equal access to healthcare, education and social systems.

But I do not believe that any province that refuses to develop its own natural resources should take money from a province that does develop those same resources.

We had a major opportunity with the Canada East pipeline. The Liberal government put roadblocks in the way. The Quebec government put roadblocks in the way. I had more than one discussion with the premier of Quebec about moving the pipeline forward. He said he just didn't have social licence to do it and there wasn't anything in it for Quebec. The interests of our nation was not even a consideration. I viewed it as a utilities corridor, like the railroad years ago. Where we would be today if we had that security of supply, not only for Atlantic Canada, but for our allies in Europe?

When the German chancellor was here, we went to Stephenville for a major event. The prime minister was speaking about delivering hydrogen to Europe by 2026.

I said at that time, "Maybe a bottle of hydrogen, but there won't be any ship going with hydrogen." It was such a far-fetched dream. Meanwhile, officials travelling with the chancellor were asking whether we had gas or oil to sell them.

They said, "We are shocked that Canada, with your abundance of natural resources, has not been able to offset in any way our supply from Russia."

And here we are, tied up in our own knots – interprovincially and federally – coming up with plans that are futuristic at best, but not meeting the challenges of today.

SH: We have talked about a lot of your successes, especially on the fiscal side. Do you have any regrets, or things you would do differently?

BH: Yes, in energy. I would have liked to have seen the natural gas development move ahead because it is central to our funding model for the province.

In health care, we made changes in the management and delivery of health care services, but I don't think we communicated it well. It should not matter whether I go to a French hospital or an English hospital, the system should be managed more efficiently and work more closely together rather than in competition for services. Our collective goal is to deliver the best possible service to all New Brunswickers.

In education, we continue to be a challenged both academically and linguistically. After 50 years of being Canada's only bilingual province, we still only graduate approximately 30% of our students who are able to speak both languages.

SH: How would you describe your own philosophy? Are you more of a fiscal conservative, populist or a social conservative?

BH: I would say I'm a fiscal conservative, but also a pragmatic conservative. We need to make decisions based on what matters and the facts, not on the popular whims of the day.

After we lost government in 2014, I wrote a couple of articles. One was titled, "Politics is a business unto itself." No party is better at running the business of politics than the Liberal Party. Unfortunately, their ability to govern has, especially in the last few decades, been severely lacking.

One example of ongoing election planning was the growth in the size of the federal civil service in the last 10 years. Guess who these new employees are likely to vote for in the next federal election? The party who employed them or the party who wants to reduce their numbers. It's a given. It's one more notch in the program to make re-election more inevitable.

SH: You had a split in your party over a parental rights issue you brought forward. Can you explain what the issue was and what happened inside your party?

BH: If there ever was a conservative value, it would be parents having a voice over their minor-aged children.

But, the Department of Education decided that a minor age student could change their name or pronoun at school, and the parents wouldn't be told. Why put teachers in that position? It seemed like a no-brainer to address it.

About 85% of our colleagues were fully on side. Six others had various concerns, including the possible political fallout. This group saw it as a chance to get rid of me as leader, a goal they had for some time. One of them had actually been organizing and campaigning for my job for well over a year, at that point.

But, when they went back to their ridings, they found the concept was well supported at that time and, in fact, an earlier election call could have likely had a very different outcome.

SH: Your former party is now choosing a new leader. How optimistic are you that they will stay fiscally conservative, as your government was? How do you feel about the future of the New Brunswick PC Party?

BH: If the new leader promises everything to everyone to get elected with the main focus on simply being in power, then it is politics as usual. This is simply one party trying to outbid the other with reckless use of taxpayer dollars.

SH: Big promises again?

BH: Oh absolutely. I remember my first election. A group came to my office with a long list of demands. When they got to item three, I asked, "What do you think I'm going to do with this?"

They said, "If you agree to these, we'll endorse you next week."

I said, "This conversation is over."

They got up and left. The next week, they endorsed my opponent.

SH: I have just a few last questions for you. These are more personal. You're spending a lot of time at the cottage...

CTF Federal Director Franco Terrazzano (left) and former CTF Atlantic Director Paige MacPherson (right) showing how much money taxpayers have lost due to blocked pipelines with Premier Higgs (centre) in 2019.

BH: Yes, and spending time travelling and with family. Physical work is a big part of maintaining the cottage and property that we purchased 30 years ago. I'm leaner and stronger than I've ever been because of this physical activity.

SH: When you're working at the cottage, what's playing on the radio?

BH: I have quite a broad range. Back in the '70s, I was a Rolling Stones fan. The best concert I ever attended was the Rolling Stones in Moncton — approximately 80,000 people. It was amazing.

My daughter gave me a Spotify subscription, so now I listen to everything from old rock and roll to easy listening music and instrumentals. Gordon Lightfoot, Ocie Elliott, Mark Knopfler's solo work and country music, of course.

SH: What was your first concert?

BH: When I was in university, one of my first concerts was April Wine. My girlfriend didn't care much for the music and the atmosphere, so we didn't stay long. Even then, I was always focused on making the best decision for long-term benefits and that was my best decision ever. That girlfriend has now been my lovely wife, Marcia, for 47 years. Even to this day, however, when I hear an April Wine song, I say, "We were there, but we left early."

SH: What's your all-time favourite movie?

BH: Top Gun.

SH: How many grandkids do you have, and what do they like to do at the cottage?

BH: We have five grandchildren, ages four to 14. We swim, play chess, table tennis, go out in the boat, water-ski, tube down the river, things like that.

I always had a rule: if it was hot, I was playing with the kids. I remember when our kids were young and I was building the cottage back in '92. I was finishing the deck during a hot stretch. As we were getting ready to leave, my dad said, "You've been here two weeks and you probably didn't get that deck done."

I said, "No, Dad, I didn't. The kids don't remember me working on the deck, but they remember tubing down the river, jumping off the dam and playing in the water."

SH: It sounds like you're enjoying your retirement.

BH: I am. I'm doing things I planned to do 15 years ago. I feel blessed that I'm still able to do physical work and that I enjoy it because, at some point, I won't be able to do that.

SH: Thank-you for joining me today. I really enjoyed this conversation.

BH: You are very welcome. I enjoyed it as well.

HOW THINGS TURNED AROUND – PART 4: ESCAPING OTTAWA'S DEBT DISASTER

Franco Terrazzano
CTF Federal Director

"Canada ... has now become an honorary member of the Third World in the unmanageability of its debt problem," the Wall Street Journal wrote in 1995 in an editorial entitled, "Bankrupt Canada?"

The editorial concluded, "Before Canada 'hits the wall' it must put on the brakes and take its government in a new direction."

It's difficult to overstate how much of a financial basket case the federal government was back then.

The federal government ran 27 deficits in row between 1970 and 1997.

Debt interest charges consumed one-third of every dollar the government took from Canadians.

Government spending increased 163% between 1965 and 1993. And, that's after accounting for inflation and population growth.

The federal debt stood at 70% of Canada's economy in the early 1990s. To put that into context, even after former prime minister Justin Trudeau's decade-long spending spree, the federal debt totaled 42% of the economy.

"The federal government was caught in an unsustainable cycle: higher interest costs led to higher deficits which required more borrowing which further increased debt servicing costs," explains public policy analyst Sean Speer in a report for the Macdonald-Laurier Institute titled, "Getting out of a fiscal hole: Canada's experience with fiscal reform."

So, how did the government climb out of this debt hole? The key to success was the government's comprehensive spending review.

Then-finance minister Paul Martin hanging out with the CTF's Debt Clock in Calgary in 1994.

Balancing the budget by cutting spending

In its efforts to balance the budget, the Jean Chrétien government set forth the best practices for spending reviews.

Cabinet ministers in every department were instructed to put their departmental spending under the microscope. The review was comprehensive and applied six tests to every expense:

1. Does it serve the public interest?
2. Is government involvement necessary?
3. Is this an appropriate role for this level of government?
4. Are public-private partnerships possible or desirable?
5. Are there ways to make it more efficient?
6. Can taxpayers afford this expense?

"The program review led to significant reforms that not only reduced spending and lowered the budgetary deficit, but also modernized and reformed the role of the federal government," Speer explains. "The result was smaller and better government and sustainable public finances."

Speer's analysis shows how successful the spending review was:

It identified about $10 billion in savings, equivalent to almost 19% of federal departmental spending at the time.

The government cut 60% of its corporate welfare and divested from major Crown corporations.

The government shrank its bureaucracy by 45,000 employees – a 14% cut.

Transfer payments to the provinces were also targeted. Total federal spending on transfers fell from $26 billion in 1994 to $22 billion in 1996.

Before the spending review, the government posted a $37 billion deficit in 1994, which was 4.8% of gross domestic product (GDP).

The government posted a $3.8 billion surplus three years later – the first balanced budget in more than a quarter century. While the government raised some taxes, overall spending cuts were more than 4.5 times greater than revenue increases.

Balancing the budget was a significant achievement.

At 4.8% of GDP, the 1994 deficit is equivalent to nearly $150 billion today. And, within three years, the government vanquished it. For context, the Trudeau government ran about a $50 billion deficit last year. If a Liberal government can wipe out a $150 billion deficit in the 1990s, Ottawa can wipe out today's deficit. All it needs is the political will.

Taxpayers force Ottawa to cut spending

The economic storm clouds weren't the only factor forcing Ottawa's hands. Taxpayers did, too.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation was created in 1990 as a grassroots movement dedicated to fighting back against big tax-and-spend politicians.

In 1994, we launched our debt clock – a 12 foot long by 8.5 feet high display that showed the federal government's debt increasing in real time.

"There were few better arguments at that time that carried the weight of that damned clock!" former finance minister Paul Martin said.

Heading into the 1995 budget, then Liberal Member of Parliament Dennis Mills mused about hiking taxes to bring down the deficit. Mills told CTV News that if the government hiked income taxes, Canadians would "complain for a few days, and then roll over."

Taxpayers knew they had to fight back. The CTF held 17 "No More Taxes" rallies across the country. More than 5,000 people showed up to the rally in Pickering, Ont.

People were fed up. And the government got the message. The government cut spending and balanced the budget in 1997.

No More Taxes rally in Pickering, Ont., in 1995.

The Wall Street Journal followed up on its 1995 editorial by writing: "The grassroots campaign ... had an impact. Mr. Martin was able to sell deeper cuts to his cabinet colleagues and steer them from raising tax rates on personal income."

Of course, the CTF and our supporters weren't acting alone. The think tank community provided the intellectual ammunition, and many like-minded journalists provided the megaphone to get the message of fiscal responsibility to the public and politicians.

Preston Manning's Reform Party also had a major role in blasting the government's out-of-control spending. The Reform Party made major gains in the 1993 federal election, winning 52 seats and running on a "Zero in Three" plan to end the deficits. The Reform Party's push for spending restraint "resonated with many Canadian voters and helped to create the political conditions under which Prime Minister Chrétien and his Finance Minister, Paul Martin, could take greater action," Speer explains.

Lessons for today

The first lessons Canadians should take away from the 1990s is optimism. Things can change for the better. The situation we're in today, while bad, is better than it was three decades ago.

The second lesson is the need for constant vigilance. No victory is forever and no defeat is everlasting. About a decade after the government balanced the budget in 1997, things once again spiraled out of control. Spending and debt shot up during the 2008 financial crisis. Then the Trudeau government came to power and doubled the debt in less than a decade.

The last lesson comes from Speer, who provides a final best practice for any politician who want to cut spending:

"Fiscal reform should not just focus on reducing the budgetary deficit. Instead, it should encompass reforms and modernizations of all that government does and how it does it. Across-the-board cuts or arbitrary targets may achieve short-term spending reductions, but they often create future pressures. Eliminating programs, divesting assets, or reforming operations is the surest way to not only cut the deficit in the short term, but limit the size and scope of government in the long-term."

MEET THE INTERNS

Each year, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation Internship Program gives students a front-row seat to how public policy really works in Canada. Instead of watching from the sidelines, interns are brought directly into ongoing research, communications and grassroots campaigns that shape national conversations around taxes, spending and accountability.

This past summer, interns Simon Michell and Sanket Kumar spent their time in Ottawa, digging into real policy questions and learning how political decisions affect everyday Canadians. Their work ranged from research and data analysis, media monitoring and clipping and filing access to information requests to dig into government waste.

For Simon and Sanket, the internship was not just about building technical skills. It was about understanding how ideas turn into action, how advocacy actually happens and how informed citizens can hold governments to account.

The experiences Simon and Sanket describe show just how meaningful this work can be. From contributing to research that reaches major media outlets, to realizing how the government actually operates behind the scenes, their internships were not abstract learning exercises. They were hands on, challenging and genuinely impactful. Just as importantly, they built confidence, skills and relationships that will shape their futures long after the program ends. At a time when many young Canadians feel locked out of public policy, the CTF Internship proves that real influence is possible early on.

If you are a young Canadian who wants to be on the front lines of taxpayer advocacy, apply to the CTF Internship Program and take a seat at the table.

Sanket **Kumar**

Simon **Michell**

Who am I?

Simon: My name is Simon Michell. I am in my second year at McGill University, where I study economics and mathematics/statistics. In my free time, I like reading, fitness and exploring Montreal. I am also broadly interested in other fields, like psychology, philosophy, political theory and anthropology.

Sanket: I am Sanket Kumar, a student at Mount Royal University, born and raised in Calgary. I have always had a passion for advocating to ensure the government doesn't spend us all into poverty and that they don't waste our money on nothing. Aside from politics, I also enjoy working with cars, be it fixing them up, driving them around or watching hours of racing content.

What is your favourite part about the CTF Internship program?

Simon: I struggle to say that there was one key favourite part. Rather, I think my favourite part of the internship was the gradual realization that after looking into the inner workings of many Canadian bureaucracies, I can safely say that much of what they do is not that special, cognitively demanding and, most importantly, does not require the amount of staff or money that is spent on it.

Sanket: My favourite part of the internship program is that we interns are not assigned to useless busy work tasks. Instead, I have been able to contribute directly to the research and campaigns the CTF engages in to help fight for taxpayers. My work feels significant and memorable, as it has helped me to become responsible and independent, knowing that my contributions are making a real difference from the first day I sit down in the chair.

What government or public policy issue is of the biggest concern to you?

Simon: As an economics student, I am concerned with the amount of rampant, economic protectionism that exists broadly in many Canadian markets. Recent discussions of tariffs in the Canadian economy. The fact is Canada also has rampant and egregious protectionism that reduces consumer welfare for nearly all Canadians – in benefit of a small number of persons.

Sanket: What I am most concerned about in public policy is the endless creation of new taxes, the year-over-year increases in government spending and the excessive amount of red tape wrapping everything up to make it impossible for Canadians to earn and save any amount of wealth, all so that some politician can throw it all away into a pit of fire and garbage.

How will the internship help you in your career?

Simon: Beyond the various skills I developed in data analysis and working in the minutiae of government documents, it has become apparent to me that the only organizations who are at all concerned about fiscal responsibility are a small, tight-knit group in Canada. It is through the CTF that I gained connections to other such organizations, like the Montreal Economic Institute and the Institute for Liberal Studies.

Sanket: It has helped me hone both my professional and personal skills. In the professional side, I have learned how to effectively research, collect data and consolidate data, which is crucial in almost every job, especially in the public policy industry. In my personal skills, I have learned how to manage my time effectively, prioritize tasks and effectively execute on work that needs to be done, enabling me to be a better contributor at any position I serve in the future — and work more effectively in the process.

What was your favourite assignment or task during the internship?

Simon: My favourite task was the "Stupid Grants" project, where I sorted through hundreds of government-funded research projects in social sciences. Looking through these grants was both incredibly entertaining and very illuminating when it comes to the state of academic research in Canada.

Sanket: One of my most enjoyable tasks was finding out which countries have privatized their postal companies. It was a fascinating experience to dig into reports and historical data that most people usually wouldn't look for.

What is a highlight from your time in the CTF?

Simon: One highlight is my amazing colleagues I had this summer. Everyone I interacted with was extremely helpful in guiding me through any questions I had, patient when I wasn't sure how to do something and very approachable.

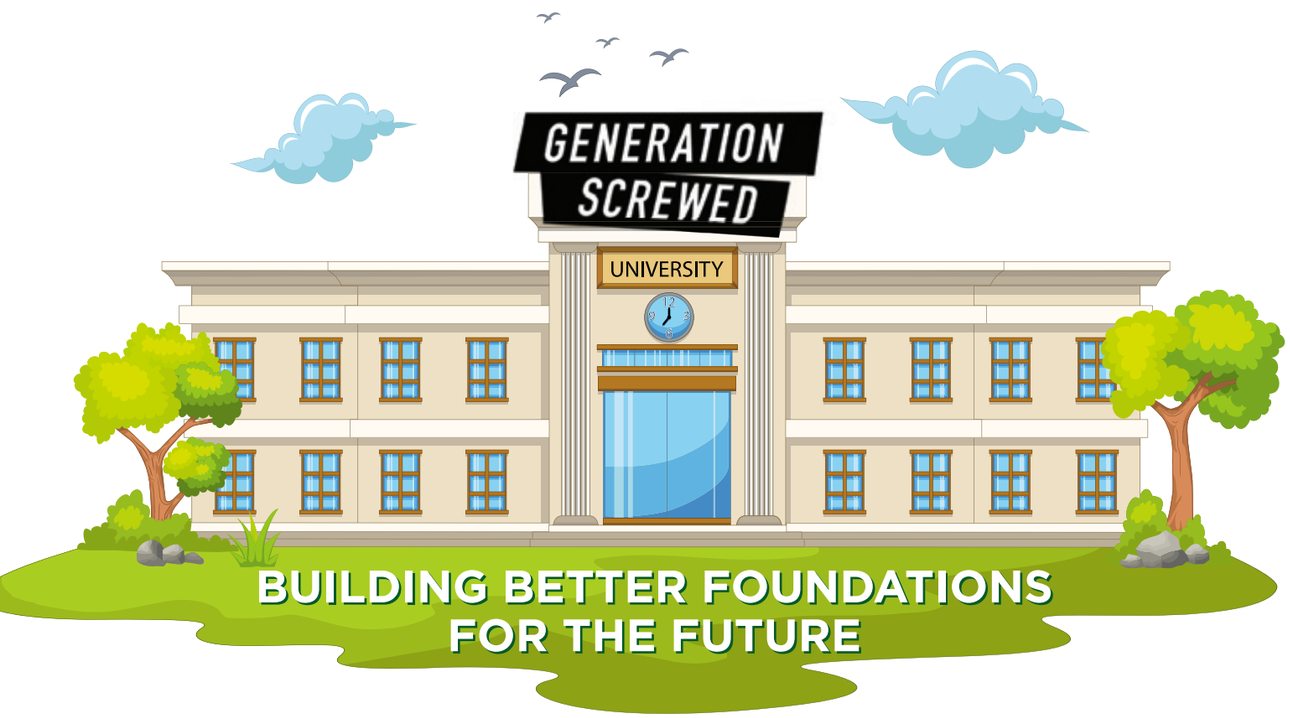
Sanket: A highlight of my internship was receiving a link to a post by a major news outlet that shared information I had compiled.

Would you recommend the CTF Internship to others?

Simon: Absolutely.

Sanket: I have already recommended the CTF internship to others, and it's one of the most enjoyable experiences I have had in my professional life. I would encourage as many people as possible to apply.

The CTF internship program is generously supported by the **John Soloninko Legacy Fund.** While John passed away in 2017, the fund established in his name by his wife Barbara continues to support the training and practical education of students in Canada.



BUILDING BETTER FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Leam Dunn-Opper
Executive Director, Generation Screwed

Young Canadians are living with the consequences of decades of poor economic policy. Housing is unaffordable, wages lag behind costs and government debt continues to grow. Many students feel these pressures directly, but few are equipped with the tools to understand why they exist or how to change them.

Generation Screwed was created to close that gap by investing in economic education.

Its newest initiative, Generation Screwed University, focuses on teaching students the theory and history of economics that is often missing from modern classrooms.

Starting in June 2026, Generation Screwed will host its first Generation Screwed University in Ottawa. This collaborative event with the Institute for Liberal Studies (ILS) will invite the top 15 Generation Screwed students and five select ILS students to the Trinity Western University Ottawa campus to receive a first-class economic education from Canada's top economic advocates.

Over three days, students will attend lectures on economic theory, the fundamentals of the Chicago and Austrian Schools, classical and contemporary economic models and the application of theory to public policy.

This education is not abstract; it produces clear and practical outcomes.

Students who understand economic theory become better communicators. They can explain complex issues such as taxation, regulation and government spending in clear language that resonates in the classroom and in public.

This inaugural event will join the Generation Screwed Annual Training Retreat as a highlight of our yearly academic calendar, providing students with a forum to learn new ideas, review what they already know and challenge ideas they may have misunderstood before.

While the retreat teaches how to organize and mobilize, GSU teaches why those efforts matter and what principles guide them. Together, they create informed, capable leaders rather than temporary activists.

Students who want to turn frustration into informed action are encouraged to apply to Generation Screwed and take part in Generation Screwed University.

Generation Screwed alumni and current CTF Communications Coordinator Ethan Fisher teaching students how to file access to information requests at the annual training retreat.

Students gather for a joint Generation Screwed and Institute for Liberal Studies event in Montreal.

Reilly McMillan and Leam tabling at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, N.S.

Leam with one of the world's leading African prosperity activists, Magatte Wade, after a joint event between Generation Screwed and Prosperity, Not Poverty at the University of Calgary.

Leam Dunn speaking about how to be successful in politics while remaining non-partisan at the Next Gen Leadership Summit in Red Deer, Alta.

Lauren and David show PEI's provincial debt to students at the University of Prince Edward Island.

GS students (L to R) Amiel, Ethan, Zaeem, Daniel, Kaillie and Victor showing off their copies of *The Taxpayer* magazine and Preston Manning's Do Something book at a training session in Alberta.

TAXPAYERS DESERVE AN AUDITOR-GENERAL FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

UNION OF BC MUNICIPALITIES/FLICKR

Richmond Mayor Malcolm Brodie

Carson Binda,
BC Director

British Columbian cities and regional districts need a watchdog with teeth to keep big spending politicians and bureaucrats in check.

We used to have an independent auditor-general for local government. It would review how municipalities spend taxpayer money and create reports and recommend best practices to make sure taxpayer cash wasn't being wasted.

But the British Columbia New Democratic Party-led provincial government killed the office in 2021.

The government claimed the municipalities didn't like having the extra oversight.

No kidding.

That's like retiring the farm dog because the fox doesn't like it guarding the henhouse at night.

And, make no mistake, municipal politicians and bureaucrats have been making out like bandits ever since the province put the watchdog down.

Richmond bureaucrats billed taxpayers for at least $295,000 worth of gift cards over the last three years that the city can't reconcile. City staff spent taxpayer money buying gift cards for Lululemon, Cineplex, Netflix and fancy restaurants like The Keg and Cactus Club, according to an investigation by Global News.

Richmond taxpayers were also on the hook for Visa and Mastercard gift cards — essentially prepaid debit cards.

The city doesn't know what happened to nearly $300,000 worth of gift cards.

While the RCMP have opened an investigation into the Richmond gift card scandal, it shouldn't have taken at least three years for anyone to notice hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars vanishing. Maybe an independent auditor-general for local governments could have found it before that much money was wasted.

The gift card scandal isn't a one-off, it's part of a pattern of wasteful spending at Richmond city hall.

Eight bureaucrats from Richmond's Olympic Oval, a large community centre originally built for the 2010 Olympics, spent $77,800 on a junket to Spain and Switzerland. The head of that community centre took home about $499,000 from taxpayers last year.

It's hard to imagine why a community centre would be billing taxpayers to send eight bureaucrats to Europe.

When journalists tried to ask Richmond Mayor Malcolm Brodie about that European junket, he grabbed their TV camera and shoved the journalist asking questions. Taxpayers deserve accountability, not shoves from mayors.

And about that mayor — Mr. Brodie is the highest-paid politician in the province. The $380,000 compensation he took from taxpayers in 2024 dwarfs the $227,000 salary that Premier David Eby takes from taxpayers.

Richmond's municipal Christmas party also left taxpayers with a massive hangover.

The holiday party for municipal bureaucrats cost taxpayers $120,000. Bureaucrats expensed at least $7,000 on beer and wine and $80,000 on catering, including 550 McDonald's hamburgers for "staff to grab as they exited the event."

Richmond is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to wasteful spending by municipal governments. Billions of dollars every year are spent by B.C. municipalities. Instead of giving taxpayers more accountability over how that money is spent, the province removed one of the accountability mechanisms that was in place — the auditor-general for local governments.

Former B.C. Conservative leader John Rustad rose in the B.C. legislature to table a Canadian Taxpayer Federation petition, signed by more than 10,000 B.C. taxpayers, calling on the province to bring back the auditor-general for local governments.

Eby and Municipal Affairs Minister Christine Boyle need to find their spines, stand up to the big spending mayors and councillors and fix the problem with accountability in B.C. communities.

B.C. BUREAUCRATS BILLING TAXPAYERS FOR LUXURY HELICOPTER TRIPS

It's a bird! It's a plane! No, it's a helicopter full of B.C. bureaucrats!

B.C. bureaucrats have been billing taxpayers for hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of luxury helicopter trips between Vancouver and Victoria.

Forget the fact that the helicopter is the most expensive way possible to get between the Lower Mainland and Capital Regional District. Why would bureaucrats ever want to mix with the unwashed masses who they stick with the tab?

Bureaucrats at the B.C. Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport spent $93,000 on luxury helicopter rides in 2024 alone, according to records exclusively obtained by the CTF.

Receipts for expenses like luxury helicopter trips for bureaucrats are not routinely disclosed, meaning it often takes years' worth of freedom of information (FOI) requests and legal battles to obtain them.

Bureaucrats at that ministry expensed taxpayers for 250 separate helicopter rides, which works out to about five per week. The average cost of each of those trips was $370 one way. For comparison, a ferry walk-on ticket costs $20 on the same route.

One bureaucrat, an executive director in the creative section, topped the ministry's frequent flyer list. She billed taxpayers for 27 luxury helicopter trips, costing a total of more than $14,900.

Premier David Eby's former top aide also had a taste for luxury helicopter travel. Matt Smith billed taxpayers for no less than 36 helicopter trips in the first eight months of 2024.

These aren't first responders who need to take a helicopter to save lives — these are bureaucrats with manicured fingernails and tailored suits.

Ministries across the B.C. government have been abusing the luxury helicopter service that offers rides between the Island and Lower Mainland.

Staff at the B.C. Ministry of Housing blew more than $40,000 on helicopter trips. Did they want a bird's-eye view of Canada's most unaffordable housing market?

Bureaucrats at the Ministry of Jobs expensed taxpayers for $90,000 worth of luxury helicopter rides. Meanwhile, unemployment ballooned from 5.2% to 6% over the last six months of 2024.

The B.C. government should be looking for savings, not maxing out the taxpayer credit card on luxury helicopter trips.

Taxpayers on the West Coast are spending $14.2 million every day on provincial government-debt interest. That's like taking 14 Vancouver homes and lighting them on fire every single day. And, the cost of B.C.'s debt and debt interest is increasing as global credit rating agencies have downgraded the province's credit rating, with warnings of further downgrades.

Hospital emergency rooms across the province are closing overnight with politicians claiming there's not enough money to keep them open.

If there isn't the budget to keep emergency rooms open, then there certainly shouldn't be the budget for bureaucrats to travel in luxury helicopters.

Eby needs to ground the luxury helicopter travel for bureaucrats.

ALBERTA NEEDS A BALANCED BUDGET

Then UCP leadership candidate, Danielle Smith signs a pledge for no PST and no tax hikes in August 2022.

Kris Sims
CTF Alberta Director

Albertans want to be leaders when it comes to things like common sense spending, budget discipline and holding politicians accountable.

However, living up to the expectation of balanced budgets has been a bumpy journey.

Leading into the fiscal year 2026-27, Alberta's provincial debt stands at more than $80 billion, with debt interest payments costing Albertans more than $3 billion per year.

This debt is costing real money, as the annual interest charge is not some invoice that can be ignored for years.

What we spend on debt interest payments is a line item in the budget, and it's the cost of building three new hospitals each year.

The debt interest cost is twice that of the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

To be a fortress for hard-working people to earn their livings freely and to raise their families in prosperity, Alberta must get its own fiscal house in order.

The good news is, Alberta is uniquely equipped to make needed changes.

We can do this.

The province of Alberta has powerful tools such as balanced budget legislation, citizen-initiated referendums and the Taxpayer Protection Act.

The Taxpayer Protection Act is one of the strongest laws protecting taxpayers in North America, and it's been made even stronger in recent years.

Initially, the Taxpayer Protection Act only protected Albertans from having a provincial sales tax or PST thrust upon them without having a referendum on the issue first.

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's government has expanded the law to include no personal or business tax increases without a referendum.

It's good Albertans have such protection because the province of Alberta is hitting budget trouble, which means that bureaucrats are sniffing under the couch cushions, looking for "new revenue streams" to pull more money into government coffers.

That's code for "take more money from taxpayers."

That means senior mandarins are going to be whispering in the premier's ear, telling her it is "time for Albertans to accept a PST in this province."

Smith has stated categorically that she will not bring a provincial sales tax to Alberta – and she signed a pledge promising that she wouldn't and, further, that she would not raise taxes.

That's a strong promise from the premier.

So, what to do about the debt?

The government has a spending problem. It doesn't have a "revenue" problem.

The government must drastically reduce the size of the bureaucracy and its role in our lives to save money, balance the budget and make life more affordable for regular working people.

In the lead up to the budget, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation told the Alberta government to take these key steps: eliminate corporate welfare, cut all wasteful spending and reduce the size of government.

Smith showed her mettle with the recent teachers' strike.

It would have been easy for Smith to give in to the teachers' union demands and write a cheque for an extra $2 billion while she was getting roasted in the mainstream media.

She held strong and taxpayers should thank her for that. Now she needs to do it again with the rest of the budget.

HEALTH BUREAUCRATS HAVE TO GO

Alberta Health Services is the largest government health bureaucracy in Canada. Health care costs are about $29.8 billion per year, representing nearly half of all provincial government spending.

The government must find innovative ways for people to make their own health care choices, parallel to the universal access provided by the government.

The government must also ensure that hospitals' specialised wards are being used efficiently.

Including frontline health care providers, the total cost of AHS employees who landed on the sunshine list for 2024 was $276.3 million.

The Alberta government allows for a shockingly high threshold for reporting salaries and compensation on the sunshine list for Alberta Health Services.

Only compensation that is more than $159,833 is required to be reported for AHS in Alberta.

In Saskatchewan, all Saskatchewan Health Authority salaries of $50,000 or more are reported.

The threshold for Alberta should be dropped down to $123,838, which is the salary of a member of the Legislative Assembly, for transparency and research.

Taking a closer look at the current sunshine list and excluding roles such nurses, surgeons and specialists, many of the salaries listed would generate questions from most taxpayers.

Much has been made of the management-heavy nature of the AHS bureaucracy and its cost to taxpayers.

Highlighted management roles within AHS on the sunshine list in 2024:

AHS ROLE	NUMBER	AVERAGE SALARY	COST
EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS	133	$189,039	$25,142,232
DIRECTORS	187	$171,220	$32,018,307

Why does AHS have 320 directors and executive directors on the taxpayer payroll, costing $57.2 million in 2024?

The province must reduce the size and cost of government to save taxpayers money and to pay down the debt.

CALGARY ARTS DEVELOPMENT

Discarded Christmas decorations and take out container garbage made up a "public art" display at a Calgary transit station in Fall 2025. The gallery responsible got more than $35,000 from provincial taxpayers last year.

HOW MUCH IS THAT GARBAGE IN THE WINDOW?

Artists should never be automatically funded by taxpayers.

People who want to create art should get donations from willing people and businesses that choose to support their work or buy their art.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts hands out taxpayers' money to people who often produce "art" that few Albertans would personally choose to purchase.

For example, in 2019-20, the Alberta government paid an individual $15,000 to travel to South Korea and tape herself rolling around on a lawn chair for seven minutes.

That same person later got another $15,000 grant, flew to Europe and taped herself hiding behind a big sheet of paper that was taped to the wall.

Other arts grants were awarded for projects such as: $14,466 for "palm navigation research." The art produced shows a close-up photo of a palm of a hand with ink drawn on it and an explanation of how it looks like a map of Iraq.

The Alberta government recently handed more than $35,000 to a Calgary gallery that hung pieces of food container garbage taped to some scrap Christmas tinsel in a down town transit station window and called it "art."

The spending on such items has skyrocketed in recent years.

In fiscal year 2023-24, Alberta taxpayers paid $2.7 million to individuals for their personal art projects.

In fiscal year 2024-25, Alberta taxpayers were forced to pay $5.2 million to individuals for their personal art projects.

That's a 91% increase from the previous year.

Since 2015, Alberta taxpayers have spent more than $31 million on arts grants for individuals. That's the annual provincial income tax bill for more than 8,400 Alberta workers.

ARTS GRANTS FOR INDIVIDUALS

YEAR	ARTS GRANTS
2015-16	$2,673,000
2016-17	$2,578,817
2017-18	$3,062,194
2018-19	$3,482,848
2019-20	$2,916,634
2020-21	$3,214,159
2021-22	$2,773,289
2022-23	$2,478,577
2023-24	$2,716,295
2024-25	$5,200,601
TOTAL	**$31,096,414**

TAKING THE DEBT CLOCK ACROSS SASKATCHEWAN

CTF Debt Clock shows rising Saskatchewan debt at the Debt Clock tour launch event

Gage Haubrich,
Prairie Director

The Saskatchewan government increases the provincial debt by more than $4,000 every minute. It goes up by almost $6 million every day.

That's a problem.

That's why The Canadian Taxpayers Federation took the Debt Clock across Saskatchewan this summer to raise the alarm about the province's increasing debt and how much it costs taxpayers.

The Debt Clock is a large digital screen mounted to the side of a cube truck that shows the provincial debt rolling up in real time.

It's a real-world reminder that Premier Scott Moe needs to do something about Saskatchewan's increasing debt. And, it's a reminder Moe needs.

Since Moe became premier in 2018, he has more than doubled Saskatchewan's provincial debt. Saskatchewan's debt was about $11 billion in 2018. By the end of this year, it's going to reach $23.9 billion. That's about $18,866 for every Saskatchewanian.

The government can't blame the pandemic for this debt increase, either. From 2019 to the beginning of 2022, the government increased the debt by about $6.6 billion. But, that doesn't explain the other $6.2 billion the government racked up in debt before and after the pandemic.

Because, like anyone who's received a credit card bill knows, debt isn't free. Every dollar borrowed by the provincial government must be paid back – plus interest – by taxpayers.

And, because the government keeps borrowing money, the interest bill keeps increasing. In 2018, interest payments on Saskatchewan's debt cost taxpayers about $414 million, or $359 per person. This year, debt interest payments are costing $878 million. That's about $695 per person.

Failing to pay back the debt has real consequences. That's because, as the government spends more money on debt interest payments every year, those payments eat up more of the provincial budget.

That means the government will have less money to spend on core programs and services. To make up the difference, the government is going to look for more money from taxpayers. That means tax hikes.

Saskatchewanians live in one of the most affordable places in Canada. A Saskatchewan family making $75,000 per year pays less in provincial taxes than a similar family living in Manitoba, Quebec or any of the Atlantic provinces.

Of course, the Saskatchewan government should be providing even more tax relief, but that increasing debt puts Saskatchewan's existing affordability into jeopardy.

The government needs to pay down the debt, not to satisfy some accountant's fantasy, but to protect Saskatchewan taxpayers from tax hikes they can't afford.

Former premier Brad Wall paid off about 40% of Saskatchewan's debt in a single year. "I'd like Saskatchewan to have a debt clock with exactly one digit – zero," Wall said at the time.

To get that Debt Clock to zero is why the Debt Clock visited 14 communities across the province this summer and drove in front of as many reporters' cameras as possible. Saskatchewan's debt can't keep growing.

Taking the Debt Clock across the province communicated a clear message that provincial politicians can't ignore — taxpayers can't afford any more debt!

SASKATCHEWAN STILL LEADING IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CARBON TAXES

Saskatchewan is the only province in Canada that is completely carbon tax free.

Prime Minister Mark Carney may have cancelled the consumer carbon tax you pay directly at the pump, but he's still imposing a hidden industrial carbon tax on businesses.

Carney's promised to "improve and tighten" the hidden industrial carbon tax. That's a convoluted way of saying he's going to make it more expensive.

Imposing a carbon tax on Canadian businesses means higher costs for oil and gas refineries, utilities, fertilizer plants, steel mills and other Canadian industries. And those costs will be passed onto taxpayers through higher prices.

That's why the Saskatchewan government took the next step in the fight against the carbon tax and scrapped its provincial hidden industrial carbon tax on April 1, 2025.

"Today, we are making Saskatchewan the first carbon tax free province in Canada," said Moe.

The government's news release highlights that scrapping the provincial industrial carbon tax "will provide immediate financial relief to families, farms, businesses and industry. The carbon tax rate rider will be removed from all SaskPower bills. This will save hundreds of dollars a year for Saskatchewan families and businesses."

Saskatchewan is once again leading the fight against the carbon tax. Even Alberta still has an industrial carbon tax.

Saskatchewan has been a leader in fighting carbon taxes from the beginning, and this is the right next step. The Saskatchewan government deserves credit for scrapping its industrial carbon tax and becoming the first carbon tax-free province. Now it's time for other provinces to follow suit.

SASKATCHEWAN CAN'T KEEP BLOWING ITS BUDGET EVERY YEAR

You can't reach your goals if you don't have a plan.

For the Saskatchewan government, the yearly budget is supposed to be that plan. It lays out what the government says its going to spend every year.

But the government has consistently spent more than its budget projections over the last few years and that means more debt and more taxes for taxpayers.

Since 2018, the Saskatchewan government has blown through its budget every year, except 2020. In that year, the government spent slightly less than it budgeted.

That means, in the last seven years, the government has only spent what it said it was going to spend less than 14% of the time. And that has consequences for taxpayers.

The Saskatchewan government overspent its budget projections by about $6.9 billion dollars in the last seven years. During that same time, it took in about $10.3 billion more in revenues than expected.

If the government had kept spending in line with what it committed to taxpayers, that $10.3 billion in extra revenues could have been used to pay back almost half of the province's long-term debt.

Revenue windfalls should not be used to increase government spending. They should be used to reduce debt or placed into a reserve account to service future financial requirements. Why? If revenues in the coming budget year fail to match prior year revenues that included the windfall, that creates a budget deficit that must be dealt with by borrowing, raising taxes or reducing the operating budget, which effects core program and service delivery.

In only one year, 2022, did the government hold the line on spending enough to pay down debt. In 2022, the government paid off $1.5 billion of debt at the end of the year. But, because of years of overspending since, that one good action has been drowned out by fiscal inaction.

Failing to stick to its budget also makes the government look less fiscally responsible to taxpayers, the business community, money lenders and credit rating agencies because they can't trust the numbers coming out of the legislature.

The Saskatchewan government needs to stick to its budget commitments and stop spending money as fast as it comes in. Taxpayers can't afford the government blowing through successive budgets.

MANITOBA'S DEBT CRISIS IS CRUSHING TAXPAYERS

Gage Haubrich,
Prairie Director

Manitoba's debt crisis is crushing taxpayers.

Five years ago, Manitoba's debt was about $28.4 billion. This year, the government is increasing the debt to $38 billion – or more than $25,000 per person. That's $9.6 billion added to the debt in half a decade – or about a 34% increase.

Debt isn't free and that means taxpayers are being forced to pay billions of dollars a year in debt interest charges to cover the government's irresponsible borrowing. Those charges will cost Manitoba taxpayers $2.3 billion this year or about 9% of the government's entire budget. That's about $1,550 per person.

A Manitoba family making $75,000 a year can expect to pay about $5,800 in provincial taxes this year. That means more than a quarter of that family's tax bill is only going to pay interest on the provincial debt.

That's unsustainable. It's wasteful. It needs to end.

That's why the Canadian Taxpayers Federation took the Debt Clock across Manitoba this past summer to show provincial politicians that they can't ignore Manitoba's debt crisis any longer.

The Debt Clock is a large digital screen mounted to the side of a moving truck that shows the provincial debt rising in real time.

And it's rising fast. Every minute, Manitoba's debt increases by more than $5,300. Every day it increases by about $7.7 million.

The government needs to start to pay down debt by reducing spending and putting that surplus against its long-term debt load.

Manitoba has no shortage of places to cut spending. The government can start cutting by slashing the almost $40 million its spending on subsidizing electric vehicle purchasers. It can also cut corporate welfare by cancelling its $20-million handout to a company to make electric buses and scrapping another $50 million it's spending on a "strategic innovation fund" for corporations.

It can also start to rein in the bureaucracy by trimming its massive payroll. The number of Manitoba bureaucrats on the sunshine list, meaning those being paid more than $100,000 per year, has more than doubled since 2020.

In 2020, 12,320 government employees were paid more than $100,000 per year. In 2024, it was 30,675. That's a 149% increase. The population of Manitoba increased about 7% over the same time period.

Cutting the sunshine list back to what it was in 2022 – still a record high number – would save taxpayers about $590 million annually.

Manitoba has options to cut spending and deliver for taxpayers. Premier Wab Kinew needs to act.

Kinew has promised taxpayers a balanced budget by 2027. He needs to deliver on that promise now. Taxpayers can't afford to pay another cent in costly and wasteful debt interest payments.

CTF Prairie Director Gage Haubrich speaks to media at Manitoba Debt Clock tour launch event

MANITOBA'S SNEAKY TAX HIKE

The Manitoba government is hiking your taxes this year and is hoping that you won't notice.

In fact, the government didn't mention this tax hike at all in its budget speech. In the budget itself, it was only featured two times in the almost 150-page budget document.

This sneaky tax hike is called bracket creep. Bracket creep happens when the government stops indexing tax brackets to inflation.

That means inflation can automatically bump taxpayers into a higher tax bracket and raise their taxes even though they can't afford to buy more.

This is because when you get a cost-of-living pay raise, you can't actually afford to buy anything extra because the price of everything else has also jumped up.

To stop this, almost all provincial governments — as well as the federal government — adjust income tax brackets with inflation to make sure taxpayers aren't getting bumped into higher tax brackets when they aren't truly making any more money.

But, no longer in Manitoba.

All tax hikes make life more expensive, but a bracket creep tax hike is especially egregious because it's sneaky.

It's a tax hike that isn't voted on in the legislature by politicians. By not indexing tax brackets, the Manitoba government will take more money from taxpayers every year without having the courage to stand up and vote for it.

Most other provinces have figured out that bracket creep is a bad idea. Only Prince Edward Island and Ontario have some form of bracket creep and, in Ontario, it's only for high earners.

Bracket creep will cost Manitoba taxpayers $82 million this year, but that cost will compound with inflation.

Before finally getting rid of bracket creep in 2024, Nova Scotia had not indexed it's tax brackets since 2000. A taxpayer who made $40,000 in 2000, and only got cost-of-living raises since then, paid about $1,300 more in taxes in 2023 because of bracket creep.

To be clear, that's only one year of the cost of bracket creep. That taxpayer paid more in taxes every year from 2000 to 2023.

Bracket creep makes life more expensive for taxpayers in the sneakiest way possible — by profiting off inflation.

Kinew needs to end it.

Example of taxpayer-funded billboard in Winnipeg

MANITOBA SPENDS YOUR MONEY ON MISLEADING GAS TAX AD CAMPAIGN

Taxpayers shouldn't be shelling out tens of thousands of dollars for government advertising campaigns, especially when those campaigns are trying to convince you that gas tax hikes are a good thing.

But, that's exactly what happened in Manitoba.

The Manitoba government spent $90,548 on a disingenuous ad campaign highlighting the government's new gas tax rate of 12.5 cents per litre.

The taxpayer-funded ad campaign featured billboards with slogans such as "Permanent gas tax cut starting January 1st."

But, what happened on Jan. 1, 2025? Gas taxes went up in Manitoba.

That's because the Manitoba government cut its previous 14 cents per litre gas tax to zero for the entirety of 2024. But the government hiked the tax up by 12.5 cents per litre on January 1.

You don't need a calculator to know that 12.5 is higher than zero.

And taxpayers will certainly notice the tax hike after their wallets feel lighter after leaving the gas station.

Because of the Jan. 1 gas tax hike, families are paying about $9 more in gas taxes every time they fill up a minivan and about $12 more when they fill up a pickup truck, compared to 2024.

The new 12.5 cents per litre gas tax is 1.5 cents per litre lower than what taxpayers were paying in 2023, but it's still 12.5 cents per litre higher than what taxpayers were paying for the entirety of 2024.

In total, a Manitoba family filling up a minivan and a pick-up truck once every two weeks will pay about $550 more in gas taxes in 2025, compared to 2024, because of the gas tax hike.

If the government wanted good press, it should have kept the gas tax at zero.

LIBERAL LEGACY OF OVERSPENDING PERSISTS UNDER DOUG FORD'S GOVERNMENT

THE CANADIAN PRESS/NATHAN DENETTE

Doug Ford greets Kathleen Wynne ahead of the leaders' debate in Parry Sound, Ont., on May 11, 2018.

Noah Jarvis,
Ontario Director

Ontario Premier Doug Ford is preserving the previous Liberal government's legacy of borrowing billions despite promises to the contrary.

In the 2018 election, Ford promised that, as premier, he would eventually balance the provincial budget, slash corporate and political welfare and cut taxes for businesses and the middle class. These promises would be applause-worthy if Ford did what he said he was going to do, once elected. Unfortunately, so far, he has failed to achieve any of those promises.

When former premier Kathleen Wynne's government revealed the 2018 budget would feature a multi-billion dollar deficit, eventually topping out at $7.4 billion, Ford slammed Wynne for "writing lots of cheques with your money."

Ford had a point. Under the Liberal government, Ontario's per-person spending reached its highest mark at $12,305. It just so happens that the second and third highest years of per-person spending has been under Ford's government, according to economic think tank, the Fraser Institute.

Ford has continued his Liberal predecessor's debt-fuelled spending spree. Through this year's budget, Ford will borrow $13.4 billion, nearly double the size of the Wynne government's last deficit. Borrowing tens of billions of dollars is inexcusable, no matter which party is in power.

Defenders of the Ford government's management of taxpayer dollars may offer a wealth of excuses as to why the premier is chronically running deficits. The COVID-19 pandemic, United States President Donald Trump's tariffs and the need for new infrastructure offer plausible reasons as to why Ford has not balanced the budget. But, these are just excuses.

There is rarely a time when a government can justify its excessive spending based on responding to some "crisis." Political dilemmas come and go, but there is never a time when a government blowing billions of taxpayer dollars isn't a problem. Even with the COVID-19 pandemic in the rear-view mirror for a couple of years now, Ford has only delivered a balanced budget once. That shows where his priorities are – and none of them include being fiscally responsible.

There was an opportunity for Ford to deliver the smaller government taxpayers desperately needed back in 2018. When he was Progressive Conservative leader, Ford promised to eliminate corporate welfare but, since then, has ratcheted up subsidies to automakers and other industries. Ford promised to eliminate political welfare, but has extended the Wynne-era per-vote subsidy to political parties, of which Ford's PCs are the biggest beneficiary.

These broken promises have resulted in an explosion of government debt in a matter of just seven years. Between the tabling of the 2019 budget and the 2025 budget, Ontario's government debt spiked from $338 billion to $459 billion.

Ford's political opposition has not offered taxpayers a credible, alternative path to achieving a balanced budget and paying down Ontario's debt. But, that doesn't detract from the urgent need to cut government spending and start paying down long-term debt as quickly as possible.

Now's the time for the Ford of 2018 to make a reappearance and fulfill the promises he had made to Ontarians seven years ago.

THE CANADIAN PRESS/COLE BURSTON

Ontario Premier Doug Ford and his MPP's stand for the Canadian anthem, after Ontario Lt.-Gov. Edith Dumont, delivered her speech from the throne at Queen's Park on April 15, 2025.

ROBBERY AT QUEEN'S PARK: MPPS MAKE OUT LIKE BANDITS

People don't sneak around unless they know they're doing something wrong.

Premier Doug Ford rammed through a huge pay raise for all members of provincial parliament in a matter of minutes this spring. And, where was the Official Opposition? Instead of asking questions, Ontario New Democratic Party Leader Marit Stiles was a ready accomplice and so were former Liberal Party of Ontario leader Bonnie Crombie and Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner. There was no consultation, no debate and no press release.

This was more like a burglary than a legislative process.

But, it's not hard to put the clues together.

The Ontario Legislature voted unanimously to pass Bill 34 in record time on May 29.

MPPs voted in favour of a 35% pay raise as well as the return of the gold-plated pension plan, which had been replaced by a traditional employer/employee-funded registered retirement savings plan in 1995 by former Conservative premier Mike Harris. Their salaries went from $116,550 to $157,350 in a matter of 13 minutes, made possible through a couple of motions and unanimous votes. Funny how politicians can work together when they're taking more money from taxpayers.

This was a coordinated effort to skirt accountability. The unanimous rubberstamp avoided a difficult news cycle, consultation from skeptical witnesses at the committee stage and input from everyday Ontarians.

Taking a 35% pay raise is outrageous, but it's only the tip of the iceberg.

The vast majority of MPPs serve a role that boosts their pay. Ford will get a pay raise from $208,974 to $282,129 as premier. It's easy to imagine why Stiles went along with the scheme because her pay goes from $180,886 to $244,207. Crombie wasn't getting a cut of this caper because she didn't hold a seat in the Legislature, but MPP John Fraser's pay is going up from $158,158 to $213,524 for leading the Liberals at Queen's Park.

All 28 of Ford's cabinet ministers now earn $223,909, his eight associate ministers make $187,561 and his 40 parliamentary secretaries take home $179,851. The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, caucus chairs, committee chairs, whips, deputy whips and house leaders all get similar salary top-ups.

With all the pay raises added up, MPPs are taking $5,429,206 from taxpayers.

And that's not even counting the new pension plan.

MPPs will be enrolled in a generous pension plan similar to that of federal members of Parliament. If a newly elected MPP serves in the legislature for the next 20 years, with their salary growing by an average of 3% per year, that member will receive $165,597 in pension benefits per year. So, MPPs are forcing taxpayers to give them a 35% raise and cover gold-plated pensions.

MPP after MPP argued that they were underpaid and that it was too difficult to attract "truly talented" candidates to run for elected office under the previous salary levels.

But this argument misses the point. Public service isn't about pursuing your self-interest. It's about serving the people who elected you. The goal isn't to get rich, it's to represent your constituents.

Here's a real head-scratcher. If, under the previous wage limits, Ontario had failed to attract talented and qualified candidates, what does that say about the MPPs currently holding office? Are they underqualified for the job? And if so, why do they believe they deserve even more money for doing it?

MEET NOAH JARVIS

Noah Jarvis is the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's new Ontario Director. Noah comes from the world of journalism, where he covered a wide range of stories and held politicians at all levels of government to account. Before that, he built the mentorship program for emerging thought leaders at the Canada Strong and Free Network. He studied political science at York University's bilingual Glendon College. Noah was a campus leader for Generation Screwed, the CTF's youth organization. As Ontario Director, Noah will dedicate himself to pushing the Ontario government to cut taxes, cut government waste and slash overinflated budgets.

FRANÇOIS LEGAULT'S STUNNING 180 ON THE CARBON TAX

UNESCO HEADQUARTERS PARIS/FLICKR

Quebec Premier François Legault at a UNESCO event in October 2024

Nicolas Gagnon,
Québec Director

Former premier François Legault insisted for years that Quebec's carbon tax was untouchable.

He dismissed calls for relief at the pumps and mocked proposals to cut gas taxes. Families struggling to make ends meet were told nothing could be done.

That certainty is now beginning to crumble.

Prime Minister Mark Carney suspended the federal carbon tax in April 2025, giving Canadians a rare break at the pumps.

Yet, la Belle Province maintained the status quo.

Not only did the provincial government refuse to follow the federal government's lead, but the National Assembly unanimously voted to keep the carbon tax in place. The consequences for taxpayers are enormous.

Since 2013, Quebec's carbon tax has drained more than $10 billion from households. Last year alone, it took $1.55 billion out of family budgets and businesses — and projections show it climbing to 23 cents per litre by 2030.

That means hundreds of dollars more each year for families already weighed down by rent, mortgages and groceries. Quebec politicians know this, yet continue to choose ideology over affordability.

Public patience, however, is wearing thin.

A Léger poll commissioned by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation found that half of Quebecers want the carbon tax abolished, rising to 60% among those with a clear opinion.

A majority oppose the tax yet, inside Quebec's legislature, not a single party sided with them. The political ground beneath Legault was shifting.

For months, the premier repeated his talking points. He claimed the tax was indispensable, that ending it would be reckless and that Quebec relied too heavily on the revenues.

By September 2025, the CAQ was collapsing in provincial polling, projected to win zero seats if an election were held. The walls around Legault's once unchallenged position began to crack.

Under pressure, the premier finally softened.

Toward the end of summer, he admitted for the first time that the carbon tax might eventually be eased. Still refusing to abandon it, he floated the idea of rebates.

But the proposal fell flat. Quebecers don't want short-term handouts. They want the tax scrapped.

And, rebates have a track record of failure. Across Canada, Ottawa insisted its program left families better off. However, year after year, the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed that the opposite was true.

Quebecers have every reason to expect the same. Even so, Legault's talk of carve-outs represents a dramatic departure from his old hard line.

History shows where this leads. The federal carbon tax faced its first blow when Ottawa exempted heating oil in Atlantic Canada. Eighteen months later, that "pause" was extended nationwide. Once governments offer carve-outs, momentum toward repeal becomes unstoppable. The same dynamic is now unfolding in Quebec.

In just months, Legault moved from denial to reluctant concession. The premier who once mocked the idea of change admitted the tax may not last.

Then came the political turning point.

Legault announced his resignation on January 14, 2026, ending his tenure and triggering a CAQ leadership race. His departure followed years of defending unpopular policies, including the carbon tax, despite growing public opposition.

That reality now confronts his successors. Anyone seeking to lead the CAQ and anyone asking Quebecers for their trust in the next provincial election, expected in October 2026, will have to do what Legault refused to do — end the carbon tax.

The next premier will not be able to hide behind talking points or half measures. Quebecers want real relief, not rebates or carve-outs. The choice is simple — side with taxpayers or cling to a tax voters have rejected.

Legault's late reversal, followed by his resignation, underscores the political cost of defending policies taxpayers repeatedly reject. The fight is not over, but Quebecers are closer than ever to ending the carbon tax, once and for all.

QUEBEC IS SLASHING ITS BUREAUCRACY... YOU READ THAT RIGHT!

Quebec is finally swinging the axe. The CAQ government is now cutting up to 5,000 bureaucratic jobs over the next three years, with 2,000 positions already slated to disappear this year.

These cuts are long overdue. In 2018, then-premier François Legault promised to reduce the size of the public service by 5,000 positions. Instead of shrinking, the bureaucracy exploded and, only now, years later, is the government beginning to deliver what it once pledged.

This shift did not happen in a vacuum. A recent Léger poll shows a clear majority of Quebecers support cutting the provincial bureaucracy, while only a small minority want it to keep growing. Their message has finally gotten through.

Let's be clear — this reckoning was inevitable. After running a staggering $12.4 billion deficit and suffering Quebec's first credit downgrade in nearly three decades, delivered by Standard and Poor's in 2025, the government could no longer ignore reality. Balancing the books now means reining in the size of government.

The scale of the problem is staggering. Since 2018, Quebec's public service has grown by more than 109,000 employees, a 22% increase, while the population grew by just 9%.

Over the same period, government employee compensation jumped from $44.8 billion to $63.9 billion, a 43% increase, roughly twice the pace of inflation.

In short, the bureaucracy has grown twice as fast as the population and its cost has risen twice as fast as inflation.

This surge in hiring did little to reinforce essential services. Only 24% of new positions went to nurses and just 14% to teachers.

Most of the growth was absorbed by administration, management and support roles far from the front lines. The promise of stronger services instead produced a heavier bureaucracy.

Faced with this reality, a lame-duck Legault is finally acting. Clear directives are being carried out, with 200 positions eliminated at the Ministry of Transport and 134 at the Ministry of the Environment.

These cuts represent only a fraction of the pandemic era hiring surge, but they mark a clear, if delayed, change in direction.

Even cutting 5,000 positions will erase only part of the expansion since 2018. The real test now lies ahead. With Legault set to depart, the responsibility will fall to his successor to decide whether this cleanup continues or quietly stalls under pressure from public sector unions.

Quebec's bureaucracy expanded for years while taxpayers picked up the tab. Sustained pressure from taxpayers helped force this issue onto the political agenda and shatter the myth that a bigger state automatically delivers better services.

Now that the cleanup has begun, it must not stop with a lame-duck premier. The next leader of Quebec must be pushed to keep cutting bureaucracy and restore respect for taxpayers' ability to pay. The pressure that sparked this shift must continue.

NL POLITICIANS CAUGHT TRYING TO LINE THEIR OWN POCKETS ON THE TAXPAYER DIME

Devin Drover
Atlantic Director & General Counsel

Taxpayers in Newfoundland and Labrador are right to be furious.

While families tighten their belts and struggle with rising costs, provincial politicians have been working behind closed doors to enrich themselves.

From secret golden parachutes for cabinet ministers to proposals for a $25,000 pay hike for members of the House of Assembly, the pattern is clear: politicians are putting themselves ahead of the taxpayers they represent.

The most recent scandal broke when it was revealed that cabinet ministers quietly approved a "transitional allowance" for themselves worth up to $48,664 — all without a vote in the legislature or a public announcement. This golden parachute gave ministers one month of extra pay for every year served, with a minimum of three months and a maximum of 12. The benefit was stacked on top of the severance pay they already receive and was set to apply to eight cabinet ministers who announced they would not be running for re-election later that year.

After taxpayer outrage, then-premier John Hogan reversed the policy. But the fact it ever passed shows the culture of entitlement that has taken hold in provincial politics.

Now the same entitlement is playing out with the unresolved pay hike for MHAs. A report last year from the all-party House of Assembly Management Commission recommended raising base pay from $95,357 to $120,000 a year. That would make Newfoundland and Labrador politicians the highest paid provincial politicians in Atlantic Canada.

After taxpayers pushed back, then-premier Andrew Furey opposed the raise, but never killed the proposal outright by bringing it to a vote before stepping down. And the new premier, Progressive Conservative Leader Tony Wakeham, has not said whether he will support the salary hike. Yet, his deputy premier, Barry Petten, has previously spoken in favour of it.

And, taxpayers have learned not to take politicians' silence on pay hikes at face value.

In Nova Scotia, Premier Tim Houston blocked raises before the election, then hiked member of the Legislative Assembly pay once he was back in office.

In Ontario, Premier Doug Ford hiked member of Provincial Parliament salaries by 35% right after being re-elected, even making the increase retroactive to election day.

Yet, neither Houston nor Ford said a word about these raises during their recent campaigns.

The same trick should not be played in Newfoundland and Labrador. Taxpayers deserve straight answers. If any leader thinks a $25,000 raise for politicians is justified, they should have the guts to stand in front of a microphone and say so.

Meanwhile, the province is drowning in red ink.

This year alone, the government is borrowing $4.1 billion. Taxpayers are spending $1.2 billion on interest payments, nearly as much as the entire education budget. That works out to about $2,200 per person, every year, just to cover the cost of debt. Newfoundland and Labrador also has one of the highest debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratios amongst provincial governments in Canada. The province is in fiscal crisis. If ever there was a time to freeze MHA salaries, it is now.

No private business would reward employees with promotions and bonuses while running massive deficits. Politicians should be held to the same standard.

Taxpayers deserve leaders who will protect their wallets, not raid them. It is time for every politician in Newfoundland and Labrador to commit to blocking pay hikes, take fiscal leadership in what is a crisis and stop treating taxpayer money as their own.

TAXPAYER GRAVY TRAIN
ROLLS THROUGH SUNBURY-YORK SOUTH

The taxpayer gravy train is up and running in Sunbury-York South, N.B., and residents are footing the bill.

This small rural municipality, located just outside of Fredericton, is now at the centre of a controversy about blocked access to public records, questionable spending and the police being called on residents who dared to ask basic questions about how their tax dollars are being spent.

The municipality's chief administrative officer, Marjorie Turner, has since been terminated and is facing two charges under the province's Local Governance Act after refusing to provide documentation that residents have a legal right to see.

These charges were so unusual that the police reportedly described them as "extremely rare."

It all started when concerned municipal citizens began digging into local government activity. After the municipal council tried to push a controversial proposal to build an $8-million municipal complex, people in the community wanted to know how much was being spent, where, and why.

They visited the municipal office and asked to view records they are entitled to see under the law, including meeting minutes and spending details. Instead of transparency, they were met with locked doors and RCMP officers.

One resident was handed a formal trespass notice. Another recorded an interaction where he was asked to leave while Turner called police.

When questioned, the then-mayor made a point to clarify it was the CAO, not the municipality, which was facing charges.

But, the real question isn't just about the law. It's about the lack of transparency within the municipality, and what it's trying to keep from the public.

Documents obtained through a right to information request reveal a taxpayer-funded gravy train, both literally and figuratively.

Receipts linked to the municipality's bank card show a long list of purchases that go well beyond standard office supplies. While coffee pods and printer ink are expected, the list also included gourmet cheese, ramen noodles, mozzarella bites, dark chocolate, peanut butter and fruit salad.

One receipt even ironically shows a chicken tenders meal from the Costco food court complete with extra gravy.

That's not a metaphor. That's how tax dollars were being spent.

And, it didn't stop there.

Amazon purchases addressed to Turner included a microwave egg cooker and a scented oil diffuser. These are hardly essential items for running a local government of about 8,100 people.

In response to the spending revelations, the municipality said it is working on a new policy for employee purchases. That's a welcome step, but it doesn't erase what's already happened. Nor does it excuse the treatment of residents who tried to blow the whistle.

When taxpayers are met with police threats instead of answers, something is deeply broken in the system.

And Sunbury-York South isn't a one-off. It's a case study about what happens when bureaucrats forget who they work for. Politicians across Canada should be paying attention and cleaning up their own accountability measures before they end up in the same situation.

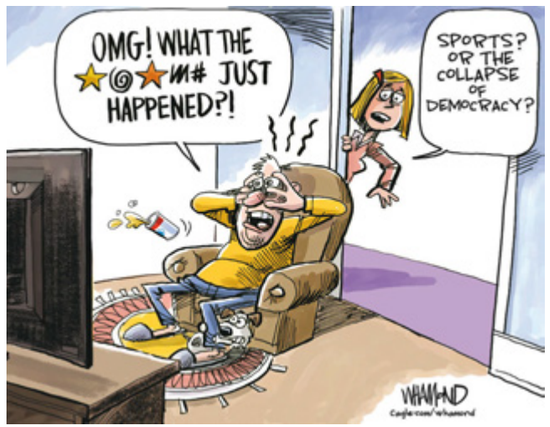
There's no excuse for calling the police on a taxpayer who wants to review spending records. There's no justification for spending public funds on snacks, specialty gadgets and luxury food items. And, there's no place in government for secrecy or abuse.

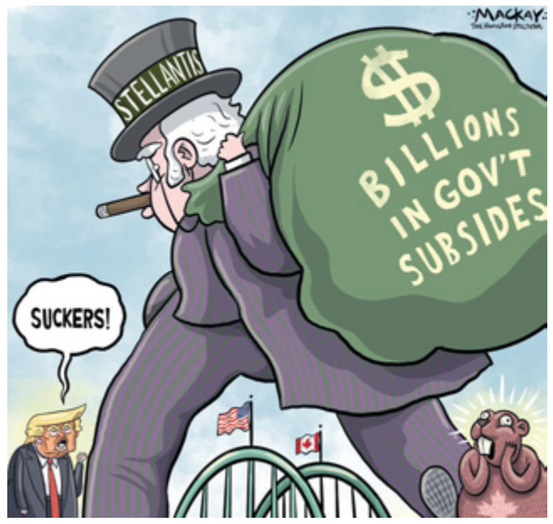
Taxpayers deserve transparency, respect and value for their hard-earned money.

SUNBURY-YORK SOUTH RURAL COMMUNITY/FACEBOOK

Former Sunbury-York South CAO Marjorie Turner and Mayor David Hayward at the council signing in ceremony in 2023.

POLITINKED





IN THE NEXT EDITION OF THE TAXPAYER...

How much is the industrial carbon tax costing you?

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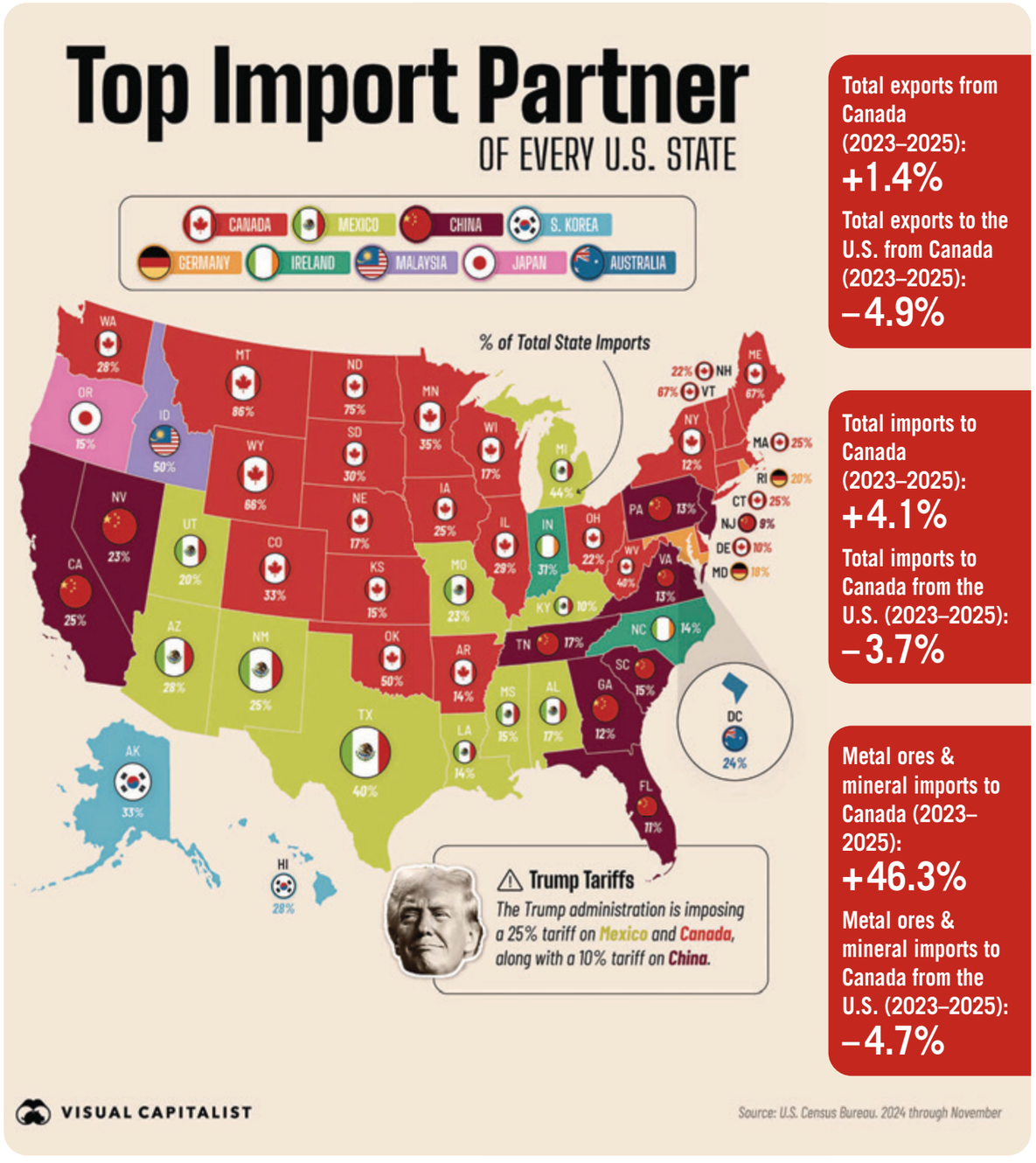

5 minutes TO DO SOMETHING GOOD

Todd MacKay,
Vice President, Communications

A five-minute walk has no significant health benefits. It only burns about 25 calories. That's equivalent to about six grapes. What's the point?

But the significance isn't in those five minutes. It's in the five minutes the next day. And five minutes can stretch into 10 or 15 minutes or even a short run.

Doing seemly insignificant good things leads to doing more good things and doing them better.

Thousands of Canadians get emails from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. It might feel like a lot. And, what's the point?

There's one goal for every email — make it easy to do something good.

Maybe it's signing petitions, filling out surveys, emailing politicians or even donating to a campaign.

It's OK to feel a little cynical. Emailing politicians might not immediately change policy, just like a walk might not make someone a swimsuit model.

But, doing something good is good for you and it does good things.

Answering a survey is an easy way to consider new angles on new questions. And the results fuel the CTF to fire up campaigns even when every politician and pundit is on the other side.

A donation gets you ownership of a Supreme Court legal fight or a national social media campaign. You're an owner, not a bystander. And it baffles government lawyers and strategists when grassroots campaigns are beating them.

Every email is a chance to spend five minutes doing something good. Please don't feel pressure to act on every email – that would be like going for a walk every time a Labrador retriever goes to the door. But, hopefully, those emails make it easy for you to do something good. And, when you do, that good is magnified with thousands of other Canadians clicking that same link.

Here's the method behind the madness — we believe in you!

It's not just a silly slogan on an inspirational poster.

Other organizations focus on backroom meetings with big time politicians and high-powered bureaucrats. They focus on slick media strategies and advertising campaigns. They continually tinker with the gears of power to turn them in their favour.

Here's the thing — you have the power. Power comes always comes from the people. Tinkering with gears might tweak things temporarily, but it always comes back to the people. And that's you, all of you.

So, every morning, we meet to find an easy way for you to do something good in five minutes. In fact, those meetings come before discussions about media strategies or political tactics. The emails in your inbox are the most important work we do.

And, every day we see the results of each of those five minutes. You beat the consumer carbon tax an email at a time. And the capital gains tax hike. And so much more.

Thanks for taking action on those emails. Five minutes matters. And, when you're done, take a break from politics and walk a Labrador retriever — it'll do you both good.

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